

# **BANDWAGON**

**THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**

**MAY-JUNE 2006**





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FRED D. PFENING, JR.

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### THE FRONT COVER

The first decade of the twentieth century was the golden age of loop-the-loop acts. The trick was done with roller stakes, bicycles, and automobiles. While rarely seen after that decade on circuses, it was a fair-grounds staple for years. The most famous of the many daredevils who performed the act was the cyclist Diavolo who appeared on Forepaugh Sells in 1902 and 1903. He was a sensation, the star of the show. "His performance is the greatest circus feature since Zazel," exclaimed *Billboard* with an uncharacteristic sense of history in 1902.

Dressed in a red devil's suit covered in scales and spangles, and a skullcap with protruding horns, he descended a 12-foot wide, 100-foot long ramp, looped the 37-foot diameter loop by centrifugal force, and then crashed into a net. The dropping of a pin could be heard as he went down the ramp at break-neck speed. Some spectators covered their eyes; others shrieked; the more pious prayed. When he was safely in the net, pandemonium broke loose as strong men

cried and children cheered. Nobody had seen anything like it.

Diavolo awaits his Boswell. While living in New York City in the late 1940s, the old trouser wrote circusiana dealer Spencer Chambers on his old letterhead, which showed a drawing of his act. More importantly, it also contained a loose chronology of his career. If it is to be believed, he first performed the loop-the-loop at Nîmes, France on July 14, 1898. He was with a number of European circuses and appeared in many other venues including the 1900 Paris World's Fair. He had his own show in France about 1911, was an aviator for the French in World War I, and finished his career working parks and fairs in America until 1937. His real name eludes researchers. Certainly it wasn't Diavolo, which means devil in Italian.

While the man remains murky, we know exactly what his act looked like thanks to this magnificent photograph taken by Fred W. Glasier in mid-June 1902 while the Forepaugh Sells Circus was in New England. That's Diavolo himself, in costume

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less the cap, on the bicycle. Note the elaborate frame holding the loop in place; it must have been a nightmare for the prop department to set up and tear down every day. What is probably the netting, held aloft by pulleys, is to the right of the loop.

This black and white photograph has been colorized under the direction of the *Bandwagon* staff based on historical evidence and colorful Diavolo lithographs, including the one on the back cover. This image is in the collections of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. The poster is part of the Tibbals Digital Archive, also at the Ringling Museum. Special thanks go to Debbie Walk of the Ringling Museum for her assistance in bringing one of the greatest thrill acts of all time back from obscurity.

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# HOW AND WHY I GOT IN THE CIRCUS BUSINESS

## PART ONE

### How the Duke of Paducah Circus Started and How It Became King Bros.

**By Bob Snowden**

It was 1956. I had the Florida Wild Animal Farm that I built four years earlier on Highway 1 north of Callahan Florida. I had the third largest alligator collection in the state, only Casper's Alligator and Ostrich Farm and the Old St. Augustine Alligator Farm (which is still in operation) had more. Along with the alligators I had many animals and rare birds including both Indian and African elephants. I owned elephants before I owned a circus.

I was a curb dealer for North Atlantic Fertilizer Company, a Dutch company that was buying animals all over the world with Dutch money and selling them in the U.S. for dollars. It was really a money deal. They sent Fred J. Zeehandelaar over as their American representative. When he came over he didn't know an armadillo from an anteater, but he was a fast learner. The fertilizer company deal only lasted a few years, but he stayed and became one of the largest animal importers in the United States. I met Fred at a zoo convention. We did a lot of business together and remained good friends until his death.

The Miller brothers of Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and myself, I believe, were the only two members of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums to later become circus owners.

Besides having the Wild Animal Farm I also owned twenty five per-



Robert Snowden, circus and animal man. All illustrations are from the author's collection unless otherwise credited.

cent of a restaurant in Georgia with gambling for tourists. One of my partners had been a carnie like myself named Moe Claiman, a Jewish boy whose nickname in the business was Timmie. One day in 1956, while reading *Billboard*, he saw that Walter Kernan and Frank McClosky had bought the Clyde Beatty Circus. He remarked "I was in the Army with Walter. We made a lot of money gambling in the service and were the best of friends."

Walter and Frank opened the show in Deming, New Mexico and brought it east, closing in Florida and winter-

ing it in Deland at the old Johnnie J. Jones Carnival winter quarters where they switched to trucks that winter. They hired Floyd King as general agent (he had gone belly up with his own show that year). He put the show under telephone promotion.

Walter and Frank did not know anything about the phone business. They were Ringling show guys. Floyd brought over contracting agents, press agents and promoters. The business was terrific. If Walter and Frank were living today they would tell you the show would not have been the success it was without Floyd.

I met Mr. King a couple of years prior to that, not knowing that he would ever work for me or that I would own an interest in King Bros. Circus. But I would never forget Floyd King. He was playing Jacksonville and I went down to try to sell him some animals. Instead he wanted me to take two of his elephants named Alice and Mona and winter them for him. I had an elephant man working for me who had told me the history of a lot of circus elephants, so I knew these two were trouble. I said, "Mr. King, those two elephants are killers." In typical Floyd King style he replied, "Yes son, but they never killed a sucker [town-er]." I said, "Just show guys?" He said yes, to which I replied, "I think I'll pass." Needless to say I would not forget Mr. King soon.

When the Beatty show played Jacksonville we went to see it. Walter was on the front door. It was old home week. Timmie and Walter had-



n't seen each other in years. Timmie had visited him on the Ringling show, but they had not seen each other for a very long time. Timmie introduced me to Walter and we became instant friends. The show had started and plenty of people were still coming in. Walter was taking cash.

He said to me "take some." I asked what should I charge? He said, "get anything you can." I was beginning to like this business.

Just then a man came from the back and gave Walter a large roll of money. I asked what that was. He said it was the Sheriff sale, and explained it was a discount sale of reserve seats out of the blues. I was really beginning to like this business now, and I said to myself I'm going to get in this business for sure. We went to dinner between shows and later I was a guest in his home in Sarasota several times. He even gave me all of his dice he had from the Ringling show. Frank was not on the show in Jacksonville but I met him later in the Deland quarters that winter.

In the early 1950s, Bill Snider, the director of the Northeastern Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, who was a real close friend, appointed me to the Northeast Alligator Conservation Commission. He would send me all of his problem gators and animals instead of returning them to the wild. He had been a newspaper reporter for the *St. Petersburg Times* and later editor of *Florida Wildlife Magazine* before becoming director of the northeast division. He later quit the state and went to work for me.

Bill called me one day to say he got a call from the Port of Jacksonville that a husband and wife, their two children and five lions were on the dock. They had been stranded with a circus in Cuba and maybe I would like to take her out to the farm. I told him I didn't want any more meat eaters. I had lions and butchered our own horses, but I didn't want any more lions. But I said I would go down to see if I could help them.

The woman turned out to be Gladys Gillem who I knew when she was with Capt. Engesser, a



Snowden's wild animal farm in Callahan, Florida in the 1950s.

one-armed lion trainer with the Kelly Morris Circus. She had been a lady wrestler before that, fighting under the name "Killem Gillem." She was married to Johnny Wall and had two small children. I helped them sell the cats and gave them jobs and a place to live. The place where I built the animal farm had been a tourist court so I had several cabins to house my help. Many show people would stop by so they could plug in for lights and water. Eddie Kuhn and his cat act used to lay over with me. I never charged him or anybody else as I was glad to have them to cut up jackpots.

Jimmy Herron stopped by. He had a wildlife show at the time but he had owned a circus previously. He had a modest little car and trailer, a truck with his animals and an old man who took care of the animals. He tried to buy my place. I didn't think he had the money and I did not want to sell on credit. So not to hurt his feelings, I said no. He went down the road 20 miles, bought a service station, put his wildlife show beside it and opened up a roadside zoo. I

Gladys Gillem's wild animal act before joining Snowden. Pfening Archives.



thought of my mother who always said, "You can't judge a book by its cover." I never made that mistake again.

I taught Gladys to wrestle alligators, an idea which was in the back of my head when I rescued them from the docks. We had poisonous snake-milking shows and alligator demonstrations, but not alligator wrestling. I thought to feature the world's only lady alligator wrestler would be great, and it was. I had an alligator pen with 200 gators, six, seven and eight footers. I had 600 alligators and 10 crocodiles total. The pens had to be different sizes because the big ones would eat the little ones. The pen we used for wrestling had a six-foot moat around it with an island in the middle, which was perfect for the show. I taught her how to catch one, and which side to approach from before jumping on its back. It depends how its tail is curved.

They can knock you down with their tails and a big gator can break your leg. If you push down on the top of their jaw, you can easily hold it shut. All of their power is clamping down; they have no power opening up. That's the way we caught them in the wild. Then we would tie or tape their jaws, and tie their legs up across their backs. You just had to be careful of their tails and you have them.

In the demonstration before you jump on the gator, you tap on the top of its mouth with a stick and it will open its mouth. You then touch it quickly in the mouth with a stick and it will clamp down, making a loud snap that's supposed to be with several hundred pounds pressure. After jumping on its back while you are holding its jaw shut, you turn it over on its back. It will lay perfectly still (it has something to do with its



brain, the experts say) then rub it up and down on its belly. We told the people it was hypnotized. Then you twist the tip of its tail, and it comes to life and charges for the water. It made a very good show. We had an insurance ding like they used on carnivals with motordromes.

The pitch went: "Due to the dangerous and hazardous occupation she is unable to purchase insurance. She has two small children. We have set up a fund in the event of serious injury or death." She passed her hat which was a jungle pith helmet. We cut the ding 50/50. Gladys did a good job—she had plenty of guts and she was strong.

Gladys and Johnny stayed about a year. Johnny was an old time showman and very well respected. He had been around a lot of shows and at one time was boss canvas man on the 101 Ranch. He also had a bar near the old Garden in New York and all the Ringling guys and stage hands hung out in his joint. He was good friends with Walter and Frank, Tuffy Genders, Bob Reynolds, Con Colleano and that crowd. Johnny had a stagehand's card so they moved up to New York. I kept in touch.

Later they started to four-lane the highway in front of my animal farm which meant my side of the road was going to be torn up, making it difficult to get into my place all summer. I had a sizeable nut with the help and the feed bill. We were open every day, Christmas and all. The animals eat every day, so you try to take in some money every day. It's as simple as that.

Since the lady alligator wrestling show was so good at the farm, I thought it would be terrific at fairs. The best fair route at that time was the A circuit in Canada which the Royal American Shows had for years. I asked my partner in the restaurant, Timmie, if he wanted to be in with a show if I could book it on the Royal American. We closed the restaurant in Georgia in the summer anyway because the moneyed tourists came in the winter. Timmie was a partner in only the restaurant, not the farm. He said, "OK count me in." I called Gladys and Johnny to see if they wanted to tour that summer. They said yes. Gladys was to wrestle the gators,

and Johnny was to put the show up and down.

I called Carl Sedlmayr, the owner of the Royal American Shows, and told him that I had slides of the show and I would like to come to Tampa and present them to him. He said ok. I had a very nice portable slide projector with a pointer, slide projectors were not as prevalent then as later on. I had excellent slides of Gladys' act at the farm. I made a very good presentation with the pointer and all. He even remarked to his son C. J. (who was about 10 years older than me) that he should get one of those to show to fair committees. I could see that Mr. Sedlmayr went for it hook, line and sinker. I explained that I would frame the show like a motordrome with the gators down in the pit and she would wrestle them there. I would build two tiers of seats so we could handle more people, with a bally out front, making openings like a side show. The banner said "The World's Only Lady Alligator Wrestler."

I went back to the farm and give Mr. Sedlmayr a call and told him that due to the great amount of money it was taking to frame the show, I needed to book a grind show also. I had a lot of snakes and I had bought a snake show from Sailor Katzy. How about a snake show? He said no, he already had a snake show booked. I knew where I could get a big hippo, how about that? He said they had a pit show called "Goliath" and they did great, and didn't know if they were coming back or not (I don't think he knew what it was. I found

Carl Sedlmayr Jr. and Sr., owners of the Royal American Shows. Pfening Archives.



out later it was an elephant seal). He called me a couple of days later and said they were not coming back and that I could also have the hippo show. I presented it not as a hippo but a "Blood Sweating River Horse from the River Nile." Hippopotamus means river horse.

We were all set with two shows to open in Memphis at the Cotton Carnival with the Royal American Shows. Then Murphy's Law kicked in. Gladys called to tell me that a piece of scenery had fallen on Johnny and killed him. Now I have booked the world's only lady alligator wrestler, and she surely was. The pressure was on. I had spent or obligated myself for twenty six thousand dollars (which was a lot of money in 1957) in putting these two shows out. In hindsight I can see it was a risky proposition. Broadway shows have understudies; I didn't. I had only one. I convinced Gladys that Johnny would want us to go forward as planned and Gladys was a good show broad. I was young and taking a risk wasn't a really big deal.

The gator show was put on a show wagon. The hippo was in its own semi and loaded on the show's flat cars. I told Mr. Sedlmayr that the hippo show would not be ready until Winnipeg, which was the first spot in Canada.

I flew up to New York and helped Gladys move out of her apartment and flew her and her two children to Memphis. Since Johnny had died she had made arrangements for her mother to take care of the children in Birmingham where her mother had a boarding house. Gladys took the kids to her mother's and came back to Memphis for the opening. I had already had banners made for the hippo show and they were very impressive (a huge hippo with its mouth open and natives around with spears with one caught in its mouth). I made arrangements with a builder who was already on the show to frame it while we were in Davenport, Iowa, which was the second spot before jumping in to Canada.

After Memphis I flew to Indianapolis, rented a car and went to Peru, Indiana. Paul Kelly had bought the old Cole show winter quarters and a lot of animals



including the hippo the Cole show bought from the Cincinnati Zoo in 1941. Its name was "War Baby," a female. I arrive in Peru late at night, check in the hotel and I will never forget it. I go up to my room. In those days old hotels heated the room with steam radiators. By the radiator was a coil of rope with knots about every 3 feet apart. I said what the hell is this--if you want to kill yourself do they furnish the rope to hang yourself? I called down to the desk to inquire about it. They said it was a fire escape. I didn't sleep too well that night.

I had a connection in Alabama for truck tags so I already had them with me. I met with Paul Kelly, paid him for the hippo, truck and trailer then I found out that the hippo's wagon had a tank which was too wide to be legal on the highway. I said to hell with that I have to go.

I get to Davenport and we frame the hippo show with a ramp up one side. The patrons walked along the trailer and down the other side. The hippo was in a former Cole show cage wagon with huge iron bars.

The alligator show did good business in Memphis and Davenport. Now we were ready to go to Winnipeg, which is where the hippo show went on the flat cars for the Canadian tour. I find out the man I brought from the animal farm can't drive a semi. My partner Timmie has never been in a semi, let alone drove one, so I am elected to drive it. We take off and going through the scales in North Dakota the truck stalls at one lane check point. The hippo is moving around splashing water out, the attendants are screaming "get this thing out of here," other trucks are lining up to get in, and it won't start. I'm thinking if they find out this is too wide for the highway I've had it. It finally started, I apologized and explained that my regular driver was ill and I was filling in (I was dressed with coat and tie as I always am when I drive a truck). They said good luck and off we went. We get a few miles south of Fargo and we see a huge storm, a tornado heading our way. This was 1957 when Fargo was hit by a tornado. The wind starts blowing like hell and I pull down in a little town between two buildings. Signs are blowing down, garbage

cans are flying by, and the truck and trailer are rocking back and forth. I'm there with the man who was supposed to drive but couldn't and my partner is driving his Lincoln up the road to Winnipeg, but what the hell, I thought, this is show business.

We arrive in Winnipeg and put up the shows, the alligator show for which we made openings, and the grind show which was the hippo. The grind for the hippo was strong: "A Horse, A River Horse, Weighs 3000 Lbs, Has Teeth That Weigh 22 Pounds Each, Has Four Hoofs on Each Foot, Has A Stomach 10 Feet Long, Can Eat A Bale of Hay at A Mouthful. It's Big, It's Bad, It's Alive, and It's on the Inside Now."

Whitey Weiss, concession manager of the Royal American Shows. Pfening Archives.

I'm going to jump ahead here because it's funny. I was on the ticket box in Minneapolis which is the last spot I played with the Royal American. A large black lady touched me on the shoulder and said: "Shit, that ain't no river hoss, that ain't nothin but a hipmunkpot-a-mus." We both laughed like hell.

The Royal American, like almost all carnivals, had flat joints (games you could play for cash and or prizes.). Each game had three agents and a head. The head got a piece of each agent's winnings. The agent got 50% of what he won after fix dough and 10% to the fixer. There were 25 or 30 agents on the show and Timmie and I knew all of them. Whitey Weiss was the concession manager and legal adjuster or fixer or patch. This was Whitey's first year on the Royal (he stayed there until he died). He had been the fixer on several big shows including Al Wagner's Cavalcade of Amusements, an 80 car railroad show. I would jump back and forth over there in between roadside places and in 1950 I spent most of the season there and was the head of a joint. Whitey and I were real good friends. The agents were ribbing Timmie something fierce. "Hey Timmie, are you going to wrestle the

alligators too. Timmie do you feed the hippo," and on and on. Timmie couldn't take a rib. He had been miserable while in Memphis and Davenport. Now we were in Winnipeg and he wasn't liking the back end business.

We put up the shows. The alligator show was very heavy and of course Johnny Wall was going to put up the show for us, but he got killed so we had to do it. In Canada Indians come out and hire on to put up and tear down the show. A man sent me over four, one was drunk, he was a big Indian about 6' 5". I told him I couldn't use him, but he wouldn't take no for an answer. I told him to leave and at the end of the engagement come back sober and I would use him tearing down. He finally left.

We got the shows up and I paid the men off. They leave, and here comes the drunk Indian, "I want my money. I want my money." I tell him he

doesn't have any money coming since he didn't work. He kept coming, "I want my money." I told him go away, that I didn't want any trouble. He kept coming "I want my money." There was a soft drink bottle laying by a ride being put up with which I hit him over the head as hard as I could. He was a big son of bitch. I had to jump up in the air to do it. The bottle broke all to pieces but he didn't go down, but it scared him and he turned and ran. I was mad and started running after him, then I stopped and thought what in the hell am I going to do with him if I catch him. I got out of there.

We go to the hotel, clean up, have a couple of drinks and go eat. Timmie and I are rooming together and I notice Timmie is very quiet. I said what's wrong Tim? He said, "I'm not going to do this, I can't take it. I don't expect my money back. I took a gamble and I am running out on you. Just give me some money so I can leave." He had not put up 50% but he had put in 10 or 11 thousand. I asked how much money did he want? He said a grand, "but you don't have to, but if you don't I'm going to jump out the window." I gave him the thousand.





The next day we shook hands and Timmie went back to the states. I didn't see him until the fall. I was in the hospital for seventeen days because of a disc operation in December, and Timmie was there all day, every day.

The show went from Winnipeg to Brandon. Business was pretty good in both spots then we make a very long jump to Calgary where it turned very cold. Alligators don't move around when they are cold. The people were complaining and saying they were drugged. The gators were cold and could hardly move, so the business went to hell and Calgary was supposed to be one of the best spots on the route. We move farther north to Edmonton and the hippo gets a cold, and what a cold it was, three feet of mucous out of each nostril. Now I have alligators that won't move and a very sick hippo. I call a veterinarian who tried to inject it with antibiotics but the skin was too thick and the needle just kept bending. He could not penetrate its tough skin. We decided to try capsules orally since the hippo eats hay and grain, but we knew this wasn't going to be easy. I remembered when we treated baby elephants we would make rice balls and put them in their mouths. I cooked some rice, but the first attempt was a fiasco. I threw the ball in her mouth, she chomped down and several dollars worth of capsules went flying through the air. They were expensive even back then. I kept it up, throwing the rice balls way back in her mouth and after a few days she improved greatly.

Thinking about it, the only thing I enjoyed about the entire tour was the Royal American Shrine Club. It was chartered by Egypt Temple in Tampa, Florida which was the winter quarters of the carnival. There were a lot of Shriners on the show including Carl Sedlmayr and his son C. J., also Whitey Weiss and a lot of joint guys and others. I was a Shriner. I joined Morocco Temple in Jacksonville in 1952 and was the youngest member of the temple. When I went to the Royal American show they invited me to join their club.

When we played cities with a Shriner's hospital we would give the kids a party and show. Someone



Bob Snowden with friend.

would go ahead and get all of their names. We had little novelty fezzes and the hat joint guy (the concession that sold hats of all kinds with your name on it) would embroider their names on the front of the fez. We would also take them toys and snacks. The hospital staff would bring them out on the lawn in their wheel chairs and some in beds with their little fezzes on and we would give them a show. Acts from all of the back end shows would perform. Lash La Rue, the cowboy movie star on the show that year, would do his whip act. I would do an alligator demonstration. The enjoyment for us, other than that the sick children enjoyed it, was when we would go up to the kids to say hello, and call them by name. They would smile as if to say how did you know my name, not knowing it was on their hat. Needless to say we had more fun than the kids. I was especially touched because in April of that year my first child was born, a beautiful healthy baby girl. I realized how lucky I was.

Gladys received a large settlement from the stage hands union for Johnnie's accidental death. She came to me and said, "Bob I don't think this is going to be the big thing we thought it was going to be." I said I didn't think so either, and she said, "if it's alright with you I'm going back to the states." I told Gladys it was ok. She bought a little motel in Pensacola and I didn't see her anymore until the 1980s. Now, I have two

grind shows but no alligator wrestling. The gators were too cold anyway. Business was not good.

When I first went over to Royal, Whitey told me if I wanted to jump in the joints and relieve the agents, feel free to do so. Whitey was a great manager and insisted there be no open tables, if you went out to eat or to the bathroom somebody had to fill the space. There were a couple of guys who just did that. They did not have a regular table. You got 50% of what you won less 10% for the fixer. You didn't have to pay fix dough. The head of a joint on the Royal American show was considered the best job in the carnival business. They all owned homes in Tampa or Miami. I thanked him and said I wanted to give my attention to the shows and give them a shot.

Since business had gone to hell, I told Whitey I would like to start relieving and he said to go ahead. To explain the games, they were gambling games and usually no limit. You used discretion not to let the customer over spend and then complain. I knew all of the agents because that's all I ever did in the carnival business before I got in the back end business. I had no problem getting all of the work I wanted, I was getting \$250 or \$300 a day for my end. I said why in the hell did I mess with those shows anyway. I figured up we had about 40 some days left before we came out of Canada at Superior, Wisconsin, the first spot in the states before Minneapolis, the biggest spot of the season where I was going to leave the show anyway. With what I was getting for my end with the joints and a little bit from the shows, the season was not going to be a blank after all. Everything was going fine until Mr. Sedlmayr and Whitey were walking down the midway and Mr. Sedlmayr saw me behind a joint. Whitey came back a few minutes later alone and said, "Bobby, I want to see you a minute." I thought I had a beef (complaint) from a customer but that was not it. He said Mr. Sedlmayr said I could not work because no one in the back end could work in the front end. It was Whitey's first year and he did not know the rule. He apologized profusely; we were good friends. Well, there went my extra money. I tried to get all I



could out of the shows the rest of the season. With this turn of events I thought about something that happened before we came into Canada. A friend of mine told me that Sedlmayr told him I was the nicest young man he had met in his 50 years in the business.

Since the shows were not doing well and he found out I was a joint guy, my stock seemed to go down. Since he owned the joints, I thought it hypocritical. He had always been very cordial before.

When we came out of Canada at Superior the hippo came off the flat cars as did all of the independent vehicles; the show leased extra flat cars for them. The gator show was on a show-owned wagon. I still didn't have a semi driver so I drove it to Minneapolis after Superior. I drive on the lot. Sedlmayr always laid out the lot himself and took great pride that he could step it off in exact feet without a tape measure. He guided me to my location and said this is your location go for a dime. I said Mr. Sedlmayr 10 cents? He said, "that's right go for a dime." Now I am hot. The big spots he said go for a dime. I built a catwalk on top of the hippo truck and went down to the mission and found the wildest looking black man I could find. I hired him to come work at the fair I paid him well and he was happy. Most of the men at the missions are down on their luck, drank too much or were vagrants. I tied some bones in his hair. I had a leotard made for him to wear and the show painter made me a shield and a spear. I had him walk up and down on top of the cage. You couldn't do that now.

We grossed \$5,000 at a dime. Sedlmayr was right after all, 10¢ was the right price. While in Minneapolis I contacted Earl Brockelsby who owned the Black Hills Reptile Farm and sold him the alligators. I had a metal tank in the show wagon we used to hold the gators. We would catch them, put them in the pit for exhibition, catch them again and put them back in the tank to move them. I sold him the tank and all and shipped everything by railway express. I called a trucking dispatcher to find a truck going to Florida empty to take the rest of the show back to my animal farm. I promoted



The entrance to the Royal midway. Pfening Archives.

a man at the fair who could drive a semi and take care of the hippo. The help I had taken with me stayed with the carnival. My wife had driven up from Florida with my child so I had a car. We were staying in a hotel down town. After shipping everything out I told my man we would leave tomorrow around noon for Florida. The hippo truck was still at the fairgrounds. We checked out next morning, go to the fairgrounds and my man is not there. I wait and wait and still no man. At three o'clock I decide I should clean and feed the hippo, go back to the hotel and start looking for another driver. I put boots on and being mad and in a hurry I did not put the ladder down. I put my foot up higher than my waist and pulled myself up. My back was in a U shape when I got in the tank, and I couldn't straighten up for a minute. I knew I had hurt myself but didn't know how badly. I was not in the cage over five minutes when a taxi drove up with my driver. He had gotten drunk and

The Snowden hippo show.



put in jail. He cleaned the cage, gave the hippo some food and we started to Florida. We drove until dark and checked into a motel.

The next morning my right leg started hurting, I had pinched a nerve in my back I thought. The farther we went the more uncomfortable I became. A few days later we were in Alabama, I looked in the *Billboard* and saw the Beatty show was in

Dothan. I checked in the hotel and went out to the lot. I knew I could park the hippo truck at the lot for the night. Walter Kernan was not on the show, but was coming in the next day. I visited with Frank McClosky. They had two pit shows. Joe Lewis had the killer whale and Freddie Jones had a snake show. They both had big seasons. Joe Lewis showed a great interest in the hippo and indicated he was interested in buying it. Lewis in my opinion was the greatest pit show operator in the business. I stayed and talked to Frank through tear down. The next day we went on to an animal farm in Callahan, Florida. The man I picked up in Minneapolis stayed on working at the farm.

I went to the doctor and after several tests he decided I had a ruptured disc. There were no MRIs then. The pain was getting almost unbearable. The doctor gave me strong pain medicine and said I needed an operation. I told him I couldn't do it right now.

The Beatty show was coming to Jacksonville for two days and then one more week until they closed. I got in touch with Kernan and McClosky and told them I wanted to bring my hippo show over for the last week and that I didn't care about making money I just wanted to sell it to Joe Lewis. They said ok, bring it on. The lot in Jacksonville was the Gator Bowl and the Cetlin and Wilson railroad carnival was already



on the siding waiting for the circus to get off so they could move on for the fall fair.

Floyd King, circus owner and general agent. Pfening Archives.

I knew everybody on the show. The fixer Bill Moore I knew when I was a kid. I told the carnival people that I was over on Beatty to sell the hippo show. I gave several of my Cetlin and Wilson friends rolls of quarters. I had them go out on the midway up a little way from my show and pass out quarters, telling the crowd to go see the Giant River Horse Show. Lewis didn't see them passing out quarters, but he sure did see the people lining up to go in the show. You got your tickets from the office and each night you turned in the unused tickets. The show's end was 25%. For the two days, that scheme worked very well. We jumped to Daytona. I didn't have anyone to pass out quarters so I would tear off several hundred tickets as if I had sold them and turn the money into the office. Edna Antes was in the office and didn't like Joe very much.

He could be arrogant sometimes. She would tell him how well the hippo show was doing, just to rub it in. I kept that up for several days and Walter and Frank came to me and said, "Bobby don't sell the hippo to Lewis because we want to buy it; we are not having Joe and Freddie back next year. We are going to have our own pit shows from now on. I kept tearing off tickets the rest of the week. They bought it.

I never told them what I did until a couple of years later after we became partners with the King show. They laughed and said, "that's alright we made a lot of money with it," and they did for several years. Floyd King named it Big Otto, used it in the press releases and to my knowledge it was the only pit show to have special paper.

The doctors had told me to let them know when I had the time for my back operation. They gave me exercises to do every day. I would lay



on my back, hold my knees and roll back and forth. It was supposed to stretch my back. I would do it every night and morning. I was now taking a lot of pain medicine. The pain was getting almost unbearable.

I couldn't get up one morning. I rolled out of bed, crawled to the bathroom, crawled back to the bed, started my exercises and I still could not get up. I

told my wife I was ready for the operation now. I thought, what a year. The highway was torn up in front of my business, I lost a lot of money, had a baby and I'm laying here helpless. Call the doctor now.

In the hospital they gave me all kinds of tests. In one, they took the spinal fluid out and injected a dye, took X-rays to determine where the problem was. They put me in traction. If you think disc pain is bad which it is, wait until they put you in traction. It's nothing to start with but when the muscles relax, you have big time pain. No more pain pills. I'm now on the needle. The traction didn't work, so they told me I had to have the operation but they could not guarantee I would be able to walk. I thought it over. I'm 30 years old. What kind of quality of life do I have this way and I am definitely going to be a junkie of which I had seen plenty. I said, "will you guarantee the pain will be gone." When they said yes, I said let's go get it over with.

Si and Dorothy Rubens. Pfening Archives

They operated on me December 7th. The operation was a success and in a few days they let me walk a little, but they kept me in the hospital 17 days. I had a lot of visitors. Show guys I knew would stop in. Jacksonville was a stopping off place between the East and Miami. While I was in the hospi-

tal I put a deal together with three other friends to build a little restaurant in west Georgia on Highway 27, just north of the Florida line with gambling for the tourists.

When I got out of the hospital, I asked a doctor friend of mine, who owned a little clinic in Callahan, why they kept me in the hospital so long? He said to get me off drugs, and I will never forget the withdrawal pains. I am very thankful today that I had such good doctors. I think today they turn a lot of people out too soon. I was not to ride in a car for a week or drive a car for a month.

On New Year's Day one of my partners and I drove over to west Georgia to look for a location on which to build the restaurant. We got the fix for the county from a man who had the numbers in south Georgia. Since we gambled with only tourists and not with locals the fix was easy. The locals didn't even know we gambled there.

We leased a piece of land from a black man who had a little farm and we built our restaurant. One of the partners knew a builder in south Georgia who built the building. We put down a well and septic tank, and gravel driveway. We needed signs. We signed it heavily. Good northern coffee, corned beef on rye, pastrami on rye etc. Locals were not interested with that menu anyway.

I knew about Roger Boyd's sign shop in Valdosta through a friend of mine who had slot machines in south Georgia for whom Roger had silk screened some reel bands. I gave

Roger an order for twenty signs to start with. He told me he had been a carnie and also a cirkey. Roger had been a bull hand on a circus when he was young. I visited his shop several times and told him about knowing Walter and Frank and that I had hopes of taking out a circus someday. Little did we know that he would soon work six years for me on my circus.

On one of my vis-





its to Roger's shop he told me he had bought a grandstand from Arthur "Hard Times" Leonard who had out Leonard Bros. Circus in 1956. Hard Times had been an electrician on the Mills Bros. Circus and he had got the equipment from Fred Pfening's Fred J. Mack Circus. I asked if he wanted to sell it. He said he did, and that Roger Barnes had told him he might buy it, but he didn't want to pay until the spring. I said I'd buy it right then and paid him on the spot. It was only a three high grandstand, but I'll say one thing for the people who framed the Fred J. Mack Circus. They went first class; the bibles (platforms) were made out of marine plywood (marine plywood comes in 12 foot lengths), rather than the much-cheaper regular plywood that comes in only 8 foot lengths. Out of the 4' x 12' sheets they sawed off a 12" strip leaving a 3' x 12' platform. Every three they made, they took the 12" strip, put metal bands on them therefore making four platforms out of three sheets of plywood. The risers on the stringers that held the platforms were made out of metal also. It was for sure the best little grandstand ever made. I made a choke to put on the end of the stringers, making it now a five high grandstand and with three rows of chairs on the ground. I had now eight rows of chairs which would seat a lot of people. I used it on the Duke of Paducah Circus and King Bros. It was still on the King Show when I sold my end of the show to Art Concello and McClosky in the winter of 1965-1966. They used it as long as there was a King show.

The restaurant (tourist trap) was a success. We made a lot of money, but it was over after March. Those places were only good in the winter. The highway in front of the farm was finally completed and business picked up. I was thinking more and more about a circus. Along about September I see an ad in *Billboard* wanting phone men for the Clyde Beatty Circus for Jacksonville. I had read ads for phone men for many years. Years before I knew a couple of carnies who worked phones in the winter on police and Shrine dates, and they said police deals were the best. The two guys who talked about



Whitey Ford, the Duke of Paducah.

it were not very good agents because they were very heavy drinkers. I was always curious about all facets of show business, and from all of the ads for help it seemed to be the thing now.

Both Kernan and McClosky said the phones were terrific. I called Walter and asked him to call the man in Jacksonville and tell him I want to go to work. I told him I don't care about the money, I just want to learn the business. He said, "I don't have to call him. It's Si Rubens. Just tell him I said for you to call him and he will take care of you." I went to see Si. He had two connecting rooms in the old Milner Hotel on Bay Street with eight telephones. There were several tables with index cards scattered around with the names and phone numbers on the cards. He said it was the tail end of the deal and they were re-calling. He told me to take any cards I wanted. I would get 20% of what I sold that was collected. He had a pitch written out of what I was to say. He said the Volunteer Fire Department was the sponsor. I asked why he didn't have the police, and he said he couldn't book the police in Jacksonville. I said I might be able to since I knew the chief of detectives, who was also assistant chief of police, real good. How much can we give up? I was used to paying off to get things done. He said \$250. He said we would be partners 50/50 if I could book it. He said to tell my friend we would

bring in a Grand Ole Opry show with the Duke of Paducah, Little Jimmy Dickens and others. He told me to see if they had a Fraternal Order of Police lodge because it would be better than just the police department because the FOP took in all law enforcement for the whole county. We would bring it in the middle of December, have a Christmas basket drive to feed the needy, and we would furnish 50 Christmas baskets with turkeys and all the trimmings up and above their percentage of all tickets sold and collected.

I called the police department and asked for Chief Branch. They said he was getting a hair cut at Clifford Brown's barbershop out on Main Street. Brown had been my teacher in Masonry. Chief Branch was a big man whose nickname was "Tiny." I went in said hello to brother Brown and told the chief I wanted to see him a couple of minutes when he got through. We got in my car where I asked him if they had an FOP Lodge? He said he was the president of it. I told him what I wanted to do. He said, "Bobby, we have a special window down at the police department that we use to throw people out of who want to book a phone deal." He knew more about it than I did. I said, "but you don't understand chief, we are the Cadillac of phone promoters, words that would come back to haunt me. I told him I had \$250 for him or his favorite charity, that we wanted to have a Christmas basket drive, bring in a Grand Ole Opry show, and we would set up a joint account with two signatures, one of theirs and one of ours. All money would be deposited in the joint account. He said to come to a meeting the next night.

We went, and we booked it. I became Si's partner that day. I have never to this day picked up a phone to sell a ticket, but I have taught a lot of people how to be promoters. I personally think that in my time, I have created more good promoters than anyone in the business. The police deal was a big success. We grossed \$65,000 which was a lot of money in 1958. We put in 20 phones and we used all pros, no local people as was done later on.

Everything was going great. We were using some off-duty policemen to collect for us. About three weeks



into the promotion, I get a call from the chief one night. He said, "Bobby we have one of your Cadillacs down here in jail. He was caught running down the hall naked chasing a naked call girl in the George Washington Hotel. When the house detective caught him he said he worked for the FOP, so they called me." I apologized and told him I would come down and take care of it in the morning. He was a good phone man and had worked for Si several years. I winked at him, then bawled him out. I told him how he had embarrassed us and he had to get out of town today. "Tiny" seemed satisfied. I took the man to the office, paid him off and told him he had to go. It was all over for this spot, but I told him to keep in touch with Si.

We kept the Jacksonville deal for many years. In 1959 I sold my animal farm to Charles Garvin who owned Beach Bend Park in Bowling Green, Kentucky. He also bought 14 surplus elephants from the Ringling show. His son David is the founder of Camping World.

Si and I booked several towns. He would promote one and I would promote the other. I liked the phone business. It was lucrative. Si brought in Bill Garvey who had worked for him in the past as a contracting agent and a promoter. He had also worked for Floyd King in the same capacity. He had a battle with booze but was clean now and had been for several years. He now owned a grocery store in St. Petersburg and his wife ran it when he was on the road.

Si, Bill Garvey and myself became three way partners. We could all book and promote so we could work three towns at the same time. It was a good coalition. We always used the Duke of Paducah title and booked spots where he was well known. The Duke's real name was Whitey Ford. He had his own bus. He would put the show together and sell us the package at a flat price. He always brought Smiley and Kitty Wilson. Smiley drove the bus and they had just cut a record. We also had Little Jimmy Dickens, Cowboy Copas who latter died in a plane accident with Patsy Cline. Mother Maybelle and Helen Carter of the Carter family were also with us. He always brought a good show. For big spots we could get Minnie Pearl for an additional

\$500 or \$750 for two days if the spots were within 100 miles of each other. We had other promoters working for us, but we couldn't book a solid route because we had to work around Whitey's commitments, but we gave him a lot of work anyway.

Si had been in the office for Bud Anderson's circus when Bud was killed in a truck accident. Si married his wife Dorothy and framed Rogers Bros. Circus and later a minstrel show.

I wanted to take out a circus which was the reason I wanted to learn the phone promotion business. In the fall of 1959, I proposed a ball park circus. I had heard about them, you didn't have to have a tent and a lot of other equipment. You could frame it fairly cheap. I asked Si what he thought about contacting the Sheriff's Boys Ranch as a sponsor? He said it would be great but nobody had ever been able to book it for a phone deal. We had the front end to handle it which meant any town in Florida. I asked how much could we give up, and he said \$1,000. I said how about \$1,050? He laughed and said of course, why? "I can get to three board members. I want to offer them \$350.00 each."



A colorful semi on the Duke of Paducah Circus. Pfening Archives.

One was the state Senator from the county where I had my wild animal farm. We were good friends and I had helped with donations for his election, as I did for all of the politicians in my county. But I also gave to their opposition and told them so, and that I wanted to be their friend whoever won, and that they could count on me. He said yes he was for it. I explained to all of them that it would be a regular circus only it would not be under a tent, and that

we would use venues that already had seats, electricity etc. and the proceeds would go for the boys' ranch. The next member to see was the Sheriff of Hillsborough County (Tampa). I called my friend Whitey Weiss who I knew he was a friend of his. I asked Whitey if he was all right. He said yes, so I told him what I wanted to do and would he introduce me; he said yes. I went to see the sheriff and he said yes. The next member was a district judge. I knew him well through an ex-partner of mine who had used him when he first started his law practice. He said, "Ok Bobby I am for it, but I don't want the money. I will donate it to the Boys Ranch."

I now had three powerful members of the board plus a great recommendation from Chief Branch. It looked like a cinch. I told them we would prepare a contract they could submit to the full board for their approval.

I told Si what had happened and he was enthused. But the next day he said he could not do it because his wife Dorothy did not want him to go back in the circus business. We discussed it for a while but she would not budge; she was the boss. I did not

know anything about hiring circus acts and putting that kind of show together so I was afraid to try it without Si. He had the circus experience; the other partner knew less than me. We knew how to book and promote, but not the other.

I was mad and disgusted. I had to tell my connections we couldn't do it. I was embarrassed. I thanked them for their time and I felt I had lost my credibility with them.

We stayed partners because we had several dates booked and some already promoted for the stage show. Si later came up with the idea to take out the "Book of Job," a religious play something like the "Passion Play," a pageant that Joseph Meyer had in the Black Hills in the summer and Lake Wales, Florida in the winter. It made a lot of money. Si wanted to tour it under phone promotion. Bill



and I didn't want to do it. So it gave us the perfect opportunity to cut out from Si and get away from Dorothy.

That fall Si and I did the Jacksonville date again. Bill was not in with Jacksonville because we had booked it before he came along. After Jacksonville I asked Bill what he thought about us booking a week of dates with good sponsors. We had plenty of promoters besides ourselves. We'd call it the Duke of Paducah Three Ring Circus and I would ask Walter Kernan if he would help me get the acts. Bill liked the idea. I called Whitey Ford and asked would it be alright to use his name. He would be the announcer and do his act. He could also bring Smiley and Kitty Wilson, but the rest of the acts would be circus acts. This would be seven consecutive days as a ball park circus. He liked the idea and he liked circus. He said he had been on the Lewis Bros. Circus out of Michigan. He had been in a country western concert over there. I did not tell him that my only circus experience had been with Martin E. Arthur's Arthur Bros. Circus, a 10 car railroad show. I was there one week in 1945 and it was a disaster. I was with the Joseph J. Kirkwood Shows, which was a big truck carnival. The free act was the Zacchini Bros. cannon act in which they shot over two ferris wheels. The show had more than fifty flat joints. It was the war years and we were all making a lot of money. I was partners with a guy named Buster Ellis. Rebel Marchette and Charley McCarthy, two grifters he knew, stopped by the show. They had just come out of Canada with a circus, either Floyd King's show or Dailey Bros. Many years later McCarthy was the fixer and had the games on Doc Capell's Capell Bros. Circus. They had money sticking out of all their pockets from a big Canadian tour.

They were on their way to Arthur Bros. Circus to have the broad mob. The show already had a nut mob. Rebel was one of the best broad players in the business. Charley was to play the outside. To the non professional, a board mob would be "Three Card Monte." The nut mob would be the shell game. A spindle is a arrow that turned around on an open table with nails in a circle with spaces and

some with red cards. The pointer on the end of the arrow would determine the winners and losers; they were all played with money, no prizes and no limit. I could tell you here how the games operate, but I won't. Magicians don't reveal their secrets and I don't think gamblers should either.



Beatrice Dante and her chimp.

To my knowledge there were only five circus owners who had been grifters. I don't mean men who owned circuses that had grift, but those who could actually operate the games. Mayburn and R. A. Milller (no relation to D. R. Miller) of Miller Bros. Circus; Mickey Dales, Dales Bros. Circus; Zack Terrell, Cole Bros. Circus and myself. They invited us to go over with them and I could play the spindle; Buster would be my outside man. We decided to give it a shot. We went to some place in Virginia. The gifter's Chinese (free labor on a circus) was to see that the side show banner line was put up. We worked in the side show. We didn't have to physically put it up unless there wasn't any extra help around the lot. We paid to have it done. I was young and full of pep and always liked to work, so I helped put it up each day. We did not have to take it down. When the show was over we left the grounds. Sometimes the show would take the side show down when the night performance was going on.

I want to say from my observation that I firmly believe that reserve seats caused much more heat than the grift ever did. First, the games

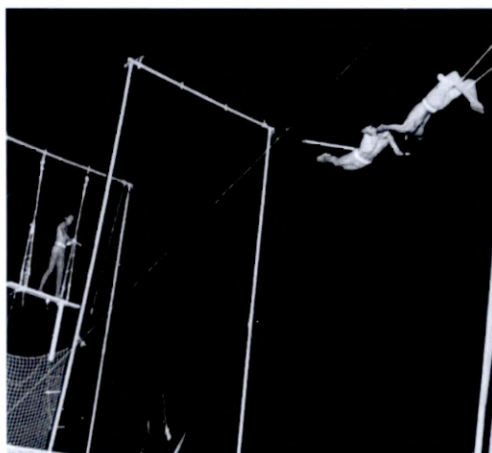
were only played in the side show. Second, the audience that didn't go to the side show did not even know the games were there, and if we had any beefs, the fixer took care of it on the spot. Third, if all the games combined had thirty customers, the games had a big day. Say 3000 people came to the circus; 2970 didn't know the games were there. But you would get many complaints on reserve seats, especially if you had a squeeze box.

Kokomo Anders was the fixer (he was from Kokomo, Indiana, hence the name). He said our call was 12 noon (all performances then were 2 and 8 pm). If there were people on the lot the side show would open at noon or 12:30. We stayed in hotels. Rebel, Charley and the rest lived on the train. We go back to the hotel, come back to the lot at noon. The fixer said we were not going to work this afternoon and to come back at six.

We go back at six, Kokomo said we are not going to work tonight, see you tomorrow. It meant he could not fix the town for the games to work. We were not upset because this would happen sometimes on the carnival too. The next town, we go out to the lot, see that the banner line is up, go back to the hotel come back at noon. Kokomo says we are not going to work this afternoon, come back at six when he says we are not going to work tonight. Now we find out from Rebel and Charley that the show is being what they call small-poxed. Someone was sending telegrams ahead all about the gambling and that the show had pick pockets (there were none). Regardless, Kokomo couldn't fix for us to work. It didn't seem to effect attendance. The show was still drawing people, but we couldn't work. There was a group of people who were trying to break the show.

This went on for a solid week. Buster would stay out at the lot between shows and play cards with the boys. I didn't gamble unless I had the best of it. I had learned my lesson years earlier. I stayed out on the lot one afternoon, went in and saw the performance. I really didn't care about the performance.





The Mario Gaona trapeze act.

At the end of the week I told Buster, "I'm leaving; you can stay the rest of your life if you want to. I have been here seven days and I haven't even shown my game to anyone, much less won a dollar. To hell with this I'm going back to the carnival." I left in Burlington, North Carolina, and to show you what a small world the circus world was, my present wife of 40 years and her family (the De Rizkie family) the next day joined the Arthur show and went on to close in California. I found out later the joints started working after a couple of weeks and they had a good season. At the end of this story I will tell you who was small-poxing the circus.

In the spring of 1960 I talked to Kernan about acts. He introduced me to Willie Story who was the agent getting the acts for them. I called Whitey Ford to see if he was available the first week of March. He said yes, so we made a deal pay him flat for seven days. Bill and I started booking: Naples Shrine Club two days, Venice Shrine Club one day, Bradenton Shrine Club two days, Haines City, Ocala Lions Club one day and Davenport one day. The ball-park was between the two towns. We had the police as a sponsor in one town and the fire department in the other. It was a good deal. We were calling for the police and the fire department at the same time.

I didn't promote any of the towns but started putting the show together. I had one semi that I had kept from the animal farm that I used to haul animals. I leased another one from a friend of mine who had a little carnival. I got a piece of cable to

stretch between the two trucks, and had a backdrop made to go between the two trucks with a section to slide back for a performer's entrance. I had a concession stand (carnival style top and pin hinged frame open on three sides), I had floss, popcorn and snow cone machines that I was using with the stage show when we could get them in the buildings. Walter sold me some used chairs. I already had the Fred J. Mack grandstand and I put it up in front of some of the existing seats when possible. It made a nice appearance.

The performers were Mario Gaona's flying act. They also did head balancing traps that we hung off the flying act rigging. The Monton Duo did double traps (they had high rigging that they used at fairs) which looked good on a ballpark show. Their daughter Carmen also did a low wire act and web. We also had Beatrice Dante's chimp, Gustave Linderman family, perch, balancing and wife on web, Jack Joyce mixed animals, two clown gags and one walk around, Bellila and Shorty Hinkle from the Beatty show, and five elephants from the Beatty show.

The Duke of Paducah announced the show and did his comedy act. Smiley and Kitty Wilson sang a couple of country western songs and finished with their new hit record *Running Bear*. I had organist Frances Butler and a drummer for a band. That was not the order of the

Walter Kernan, Snowden's mentor. Pfening Archives.



performance of course. We blew the show off with the five elephants. Frances Butler had a flat bed truck that she used to pull her trailer. The organ was mounted on a swivel so she could move it around to see the acts. She played mainly fairs. She had a big Hammond organ with big speakers and her husband was an electrician which made it perfect for me. The elephant act was the one McClosky and Kernan bought from Pete and Norma Cristiani. Norma's father Ben Davenport had given it to them for a wedding gift. It was a great act. When I talked to Walter and Frank about leasing them for the week, Steve Fanning was working the act. Frank agreed to the lease if I would cover up the Beatty show name on the side of the truck when the show was on the lot, which I did. My word has always been my bond. I booked Jack Joyce myself. At the time he had a shopping center show with beautiful pens for displaying his animals. I knew Jack before when he had visited my animal farm. He also had a pony ride. Jack's act and his equipment were first class. The act was a mixed animal act consisting of camels, llamas, ponies, a zebra, a jackass, and a monkey. He played all of the big dates in the country.

I had never seen a ball park circus, but I understood a man (whom I later met) named Gil Gray was very successful with one for many years. I don't think there was ever one before or since like ours. I bought a used side show marquee from Kernan which said "entrance." I put it up in front of the entrance to the ball park. We used a regular ticket box to sell the tickets. I rented a house trailer to sleep in and use as an office to settle up with the sponsors, etc. I put the concession stand up outside the marquee then the five elephants lined up in front of their truck. On the other side of the midway Jack Joyce's animals were lined up in their pens, and a pony ride and a generator on a trailer. I gave him 100% of his pony ride for the use of his generator to light up the midway. The midway made a hell of a flash. When the people came in they knew they were going to see a good show. Other than the good performance, I had Red Maynard as prop man and superintendent, and Kenny McConnell (who



would later be my boss butcher for many years), Johnny Walker Sr., Jimmy Keenan, and "Pete the Tramp" Phelps (who would later be my boss canvas man for many years), all ex-Ringling show and now Beatty show butchers for the concession department. They also helped Red put the show up and down.

If we had of known in advance that we were going to have the animals on the midway we would have promoted it differently. The only thing we knew we were going to have was a circus and the Duke of Paducah. We would have featured a big free menagerie. It would have been terrific.

The sponsors loved the show and they all made money. I got a lot of good letters from them which I used for a long time. The people loved the show and we did not get one complaint about anything. I think it was because they saw a better show than they thought they were going to see. Walter liked the show and he came every day except the last day in Ocala. He would stay in the show through each performance except when the guy started singing *Running Bear*. He couldn't stand that. He would come out and talk to the butchers through that act, he complemented me one day. He said, "Bobby if you had a cat act you would have as good a show as I have." Of course I needed a lot more than that but it was nice of him to say that.

The seven days were a big financial success for Bill Garvey and me, and I had learned a lot. My first phone promotion was big and now this. I was feeling pretty good about myself. This was a long way from Arthur Bros. in 1945.

Whitey Ford called to tell me that he enjoyed the circus tour and asked if we had any more planned. I told him we would let him know. I talked to Bill about taking out a circus. He was having a house built in St. Petersburg, and said he would have to think it over. I liked the business, we had made a lot of money that week. I was enthused but I realized it should be a regular tented circus. Although we had perfect weather for those days we had to consider the elements. With a phone promotion show the tickets are sold in advance, meaning you have to show or kick back the money including what the

sponsor gave to the promoter. The reason the phone promotions were so great was because at 11:00 am show day you settled up with the sponsor and received your end in cash at the circus office, which was a big part of your gross for the day. Plus, the sponsor's obligation was to furnish the following: telephones and an office for the promoter, a lot suitable for the circus, all licenses or permits, and police and fire protection if required. They would usually get those items waived. It took away a lot of the gamble.

We had a great crew of promoters, but I didn't want to do this without Bill who was a good contracting agent. Don't let anyone tell you differently, the front end is the most important part of any circus. It is not the performance, although you should have a pleasing show. If you don't get butts on the seats, keep your money in the bank and leave your show in the barn.

I asked Bill what he thought about seeing if Whitey wanted to go in with us. We would use his name like before and he didn't have to furnish anyone else, just himself and do the announcing and his act--and come up with a third of the money. His name was easy to book, especially in the territory we were going to play.

Bill agreed, and said he would let his wife handle the contractor who was building his house. I called Whitey he said yes, if he was free. He was being considered for a part in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. If he got it he would not be available that summer. He would let us know soon. We decided we needed to hire another contracting agent to help Bill. I would put the show together, handle the promoters and manage the show. Whitey was to announce the show and do his act. He was a country bumpkin with chuck wagon humor. He wore a green suit and hat with high buttoned shoes. His monologue was country with remarks about his big fat wife, etc. He would always end it in rhyme with something like, "I'm as happy as I can be, but I'm going back to the wagon boys, these shoes are killing me."

I started putting the show together. I bought a used 60 foot round end tent with two 20 foot middles that I laced together to make a 40, and two

30 foot middles which gave me a 60' x 160' big top. I bought it from Bob Ketrow who owned Florida Tent Rental Co. which my future brother-in-law Harold Barnes would buy many years later. Bob Ketrow was also a showman, his father had Kay Bros. Circus for many years. Red Maynard worked for Bob in the winter time.



Roger Boyd.

After I sold the animal farm I moved to New Smyrna Beach, Florida where I put the ball park show together. It was only twenty miles from Deland and I saw a lot of Walter when they were in winter quarters. I bought a high school horse from him that had been part of a liberty act that Jack Joyce had trained for Beatty before Kernan and McClosky bought the show. The horses had also been broke as high school horses and were old. They took the act out of the performance and sold me one. Walter told me when advertising for acts to put in the ad "want acts doing two or more." He also told how to set up the office with daily reports etc., and to form two corporations, one a holding company owning all the equipment and an operating company leasing the equipment from the holding company. He advised to keep the operating company broke so if anything happened you would not lose the equipment. If the operating company was broke there was nothing for the creditors to get.

Walter Kernan was truly my mentor and I would not have been in the circus business if I had not met him.

I bought a used 25 kw gas genera-



tor with very few hours on it that had been an emergency generator for a hospital at a airfield near Miami. It had a special muffler so you could stand by it and not hear it running which made it perfect for the circus. It was still on the King show when I sold my interest.

I called the Miller brothers at Pigeon Forge, Tennessee about leasing some elephants for the season. They owned the Ft. Weare Game Park and they had taken out a circus a couple of years earlier. They had a three act, Helen, Ola and Katy that they had bought from a carnival in Texas, but they didn't have anyone to work them. They would furnish a driver but no elephant man. Matt and Mary Larish had worked the act on their circus. They also had three nice acts, a pony drill, a dog act, and pony riding dogs and monkey. Matt was also a good builder. I called him and we made a deal. His step-son was also a good concessions man and electrician. It made a great package. Another man, Buddy Cantor, who I had met on the Miller Bros. shopping center show when it came into New Smyrna, helped me put the show together. He was a good friend of Walter's and Frank's. He had been on the Ringling show and he knew a lot of circus people. He was to have the cook house and the blue room, a place where the show people could buy a drink or a beer and play cards if they wanted. He was also to have a concession.

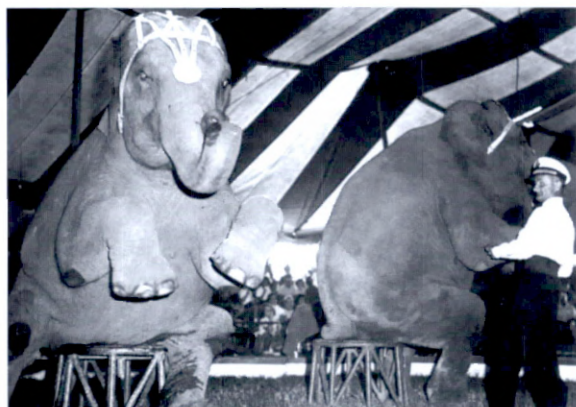
We went to Sarasota to see if we could round up some help. Peter March, who had not been out since the under-canvas Ringling show closed in 1956, had the menagerie and was supposed to be the only one who could put up the poleless tent that Leif Osumusson designed. He had been in charge of the Ringling sailloft and later opened Leaf Tent and Sail Co. He made all Beatty show tents. I had seen a picture of this new type tent. All of the poles were outside with pick up cables to hold up the quarters and center poles. That was so it was clear span inside so they could easily spot the cage wagons. Pete had been married to Ann Hamilton, the Ringling horse woman. I hired him as boss canvas man and we took him back with us while in Sarasota. I also bought a

used dressing room tent from the Ringling show to use as a side show. It was 40' x 60' top.

Things were shaping up rather well. Garvy booked Poplar Bluff, Missouri for our opening day, June 15, 1960. He also booked Cape Girardeau. I leased the fairgrounds there to build the show and decided to do the promotion myself. I had been in touch with Roger Boyd and asked him if he wanted to go back on the road, that he would be manager of the side show, purchasing agent and mailman and for him to come in to Cape Girardeau and put the side show together and paint the show. Roger was a great sign painter, but he didn't paint pictorials. I had Snap Wyatt, the banner man in Tampa, do the side show banners. Roger said he would close up his shop and meet me in Cape Girardeau. I bought a used cattle trailer and tractor to load the poles, grandstand, chairs and canvas. I bought the longest house trailer I could find, and had it customized. I now had two children. I had bunk beds in the middle bedroom. It had a toilet and shower but could only be hooked up in trailer parks. I had a marine toilet installed with a 50 gallon holding tank. I had a friend of mine who had a Chevy dealership order a truck from Detroit with the cab and chassis cut off just long enough to be legal pulling the trailer on the highway. I put two 40 gallon fresh water tanks on the truck and a small generator and water pump, making it completely self contained.

I used the semi from the animal farm on the ball park show, and I bought a truck in Miami when I got the generator. I had kept the top and

Matt Larish and the Duke elephants.



side wall that I had used on the alligator show, plus a couple of big snakes from the animal farm. I was going to use the top for a snake show on the circus. We had picked up a man who could also drive. We now had three show trucks and three drivers. I sent my wife ahead with the two children. She was from St. Louis, and joined me when I got to Cape Girardeau. Buddy and Pete drank a lot but I didn't mind as long as they did their work and were sober when driving, which they were. They were not alcoholics; they just liked to drink a lot. I gave Buddy money for expenses to take the trucks to Cape Girardeau plus some extra money for minor breakdowns. I had a contact phone number in St. Louis for him to call if he had any serious problems or needed me. I followed behind and called every few hours.

Everything went fine the first day, then the front end on my truck started making a banging noise. At the next little town the Chevy garage was down a very narrow street. The trailer and truck together were 52' long, putting it just under the 53' limit in some states. I had experience driving a car trailer while on the carnival, but not one this long. There was a plumber's truck parked along the side of the street that had a pipe vise on the side with a sharp point on it that was used to ream the ends when the pipe was cut. I went just a fraction too close to the truck and ripped a cut the full length of the trailer. It wasn't deep enough to hurt the structure; it just cut the aluminum. When I got to the garage they found out the factory had not greased my truck properly. It was nothing serious, but I had ripped my

new trailer after having been slept in exactly once. I couldn't go back. I had three trucks ahead. I thought about the old saying, "the show must go on." The rest of the trip was without incident.

Matt Larish was at the Cape Girardeau fairgrounds waiting and he was a gem. He had three nice acts and he was going to work the



elephants. A terrific builder, he had nice equipment, a semi for his animals and living quarters in front. He rode my high school horse in the show and was also a backup man for the big top. He was truly an all-around showman and didn't drink. You don't find many like Matt.

I got the phone room office opened. I would go down every morning and get them started, get the collectors out and then go to the fairgrounds until around 5:00 pm to check in the collectors. We used all pro phone men who were on a percentage so you didn't have to stay with them. If they didn't work they didn't get paid. We used locals or the sponsor to collect. I put a phone in my trailer at the fairgrounds so I would have a contact phone. Matt started building blues (bleachers). I already had a grandstand, but we had some chairs that needed repairs.

Things were buzzing at the fairgrounds. Roger Boyd and family came in and started getting the side show framed and painting the trucks. I called the Bundy Olds and Truck dealership in East St. Louis, Illinois. I knew about him because for many years he sold show people cars, trucks and trailers. He had a connection with a trucking company for its used tractors. The company would take them out of service at a certain age. They were very good used trucks because they had a very good service schedule. He sold mostly to Mid-western showmen. There was a man in Pennsylvania named Johnny Canole who sold to show people in the East and South. When I called Mr. Bundy I asked what he had, and he replied he had the Tom Packs Circus concession office in perfect shape, and plenty of tractors.

Buddy Cantor and I went up to East St. Louis and I bought the semi and a tractor; they put on a paper dealer's 24 hour tags. We got tags out of Alabama. There was a couple of connections, all you had to do was call up, send the money and they would send the tags. There was a similar one in Arkansas for driver's licenses.

We went across to St. Louis to a tent pole company to get some poles, and to go to a mission to see if I could pick up some help to take back to Cape Girardeau. I went in and saw

the preacher, told him what I wanted and if I hired anyone I would make a donation. He said I would have to wait until after services before I could talk to them. I found out later that they couldn't get soup if they didn't hear the sermon. I waited and gave my pitch. I told them they would travel and see the country, that we furnished three meals a day and a place to sleep, and that they would work a few hours in the morning setting up and a few hours at night tearing down. It was sort of a family or club atmosphere; the pay was \$18.00 a week net and if they worked more they would get more. I only had one taker. I gave the preacher a five-dollar bill, and the man got his bag and we were on our way. His name was George Hershley. He said he was a side show man and mentioned several shows he had been with. He said he did knife throwing, fire eating and an iron eyelid act. He would fill a bucket of water and put some hooks around his eyelids, put a chain on them and swing the bucket around. I had heard of it, but I didn't know the gimmick. He was practically a one man side show. He said he also did a half and half act. I knew that was a half woman and half man routine that was on some carnival side shows, and I understood on some circuses.



Matt Larish's liberty ponies.

He said he had the half and half gimmick right there in his wallet. I knew how it operated, but I didn't know the gimmick. It worked something like this: The end of the stage would be partitioned off and a pole would come right to the middle of the stage. A side wall going back to the end of the tent made two separate places, one for the women and one for

the men. They could not see each other. It was called a blow off, the last act in the side show and another fee was charged for this act. The performer would give a little talk. Half and halves would generally shave one side of their body, and have long hair on one side and a man's cut on the other or long hair altogether. They would disrobe and show the male organ. I noticed George had on one of those big caps to cover his hair but he looked like an American Indian and I thought he used it in his other acts. I told him we could not use that at all since this was a family show and the Duke of Paducah was very straight laced, but his other acts would be fine. I didn't tell him but I was thrilled he could do so much. I had made a good find.

He said he had the half and half gimmick in his hip pocket. I was curious, but I didn't want to come off as an unseasoned showman who didn't know the gimmick. So I asked, "Which gimmick do you use?" He pulled a condom out his wallet. Now I am really curious. I asked how it worked. He explained that you had a thin belt around your waist and a loin cloth hanging down in the front and back. He put his testicles in the condom, tied a string around it and pulled them up out of sight from the front, tying the string to the belt in the back. He would slightly push flesh together between his penis and his leg and tell the audience that was the female organ. He would only give them a quick glance of it. Well, I thought to myself, I have certainly learned something new on this trip.

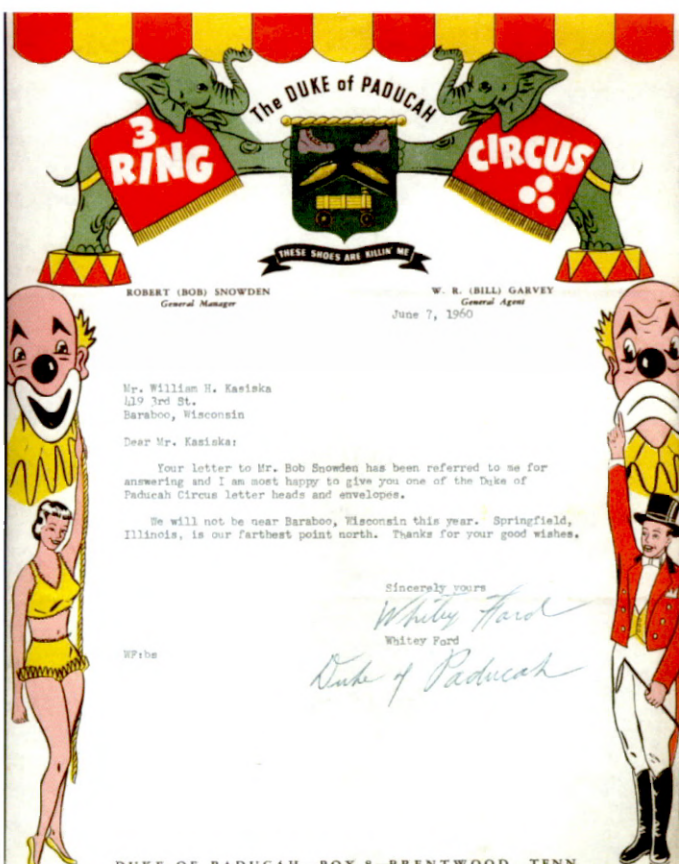
I sent Buddy ahead with the truck and trailer, and I caught up with him just in time to see a highway patrolman pull him over. I pulled up behind them, got out and went up to see about it. He was checking the tags and wanted to see Buddy's driver's license. It was alright, but he wanted to see inside the trailer. He saw the tent poles and said it was not legal to haul anything on a temporary tag. We would have to see a justice of the peace in the next town and pay a fine. I signaled Buddy to walk away and I told George to stay in the car when I stopped. I told the patrolman that I didn't know you couldn't haul any-



thing with a paper tag, and I truthfully didn't. I told him they were tent poles for the circus, we played for a lot of police departments and FOP lodges, and our opening was for the Poplar Bluff Police Department, which it was. I told him that I would like to donate twenty-five dollars to their policemen's ball and would he give it to them for me. And I would appreciate it very much if he could see his way clear to let me go. He said ok, but if anyone else stops you don't tell them I let you go. I said I wouldn't and would not have if I had been stopped. We shook hands, I thanked him and we went on our way. I was a pretty good fixer.

Back in Cape Girardeau everyone was working hard. Matt had cut the rack off the cattle trailer except in the front, which made a perfect place for the chairs. He was building a boom affair on the back of the trailer that turned around with a pulley block so we could pull the bundles of canvas up and swing them around on top of the load with an elephant. It worked out perfectly; we didn't have a spool truck. I had Matt put a window in the end of the Tom Packs concession truck so we could use it as a ticket wagon and office. He also partitioned a small office that was separate from the ticket office for me to check up with the sponsor, and a stock room for concessions. In the front end was a state room that I gave to the boss canvas man. It made a great piece of equipment. I bought another trailer for a workingmen's sleeper with a cook house kitchen on the back and an awning for the tables. Roger was busy getting his side show ready and building a knife board for George. Incidentally, I paid George more than eighteen dollars a week. Roger was also painting and scrolling the trucks. I put ads for acts and bill posters etc. in *Billboard*.

The front end was going good, and we were booked several weeks ahead. The promotions were good. We didn't do night calls then, just day



The expensive letterhead Whitey Ford had printed. Note Count Nicholas at lower right. Pfening Archives.

calls to businesses, which did not take too long in each town. I started getting calls from acts. I found out there were some acts that didn't stay long on any show for one reason or the other. A little show, Adams Bros. I believe, had closed. I had contacted Beatrice Dante with the chimp I had used with the ballpark show and she said she could stay until the fairs she had booked started. Everyone loved the chimp and the men liked to see her dance around. I booked Don Floyd who did tight wire and his wife did neck loop. She had nice wardrobe that gave a butterfly effect. Mary Carlton of the Skating Carltons also did a not-so-good trap act and hedaughter did web.

Dick Loter did an act that I have never seen before or since. He said his father had also done the same act. He had two uprights approximately 12 or 14 feet high guyed out with a cross bar at the top. He would do something like a casting act in a clown costume in which he did some falls. For the finish trick he had gim-

micks in his shoe soles and a gimmick on the crossbar with bearings so it would turn over and over, and he would make a few tease falls, then make a dive out in the air and turn over and over only held by his feet. The act was well received. He also clowned in the show and had a single monkey act. His daughter did web. I also let him manage the snake show. His mother Marie had a little camper with an organ on the back with windows that folded so she could see the show. We backed it in the tent and that was our music.

Archie Silverlake came on. He was an old clown and a gentleman, a nicer person you couldn't find. I loved him and he stayed with me for five years until he died. He brought one of his grandsons who did Roman rings and was a mechanic of sorts. Last but not least, Buster and Sylvia Todd had two dog acts, one of which I have never seen since. They had all Dalmatians in one ring and all Spitzes the other, which gave me three rings of dogs with Matt and Mary's. He also had a beautiful horse that did a high school act which with my horse that Matt rode gave me two rings of horses. He also did rope spinning and a whip act with his wife. He had been a New York State Policeman and was on the mounted patrol and used to perform at some New York fairs.

But that's not all. Buster was a great heel and toe banner man. That's someone who goes downtown in the morning and sells banner advertising to some of the merchants. We would hang them in the big top and the announcer would call attention to them during the show.

Sometimes we had a tractor pull using one from a local dealer, sort of a tug of war between a tractor and an elephant. Matt would instruct the driver not to jerk the elephant, and they would see saw back and forth a



little and then we would let the tractor win. The announcer would say, "you see not even an elephant can out do the tractor." One day a wise guy driver was going to show off and he pulled a little too hard, Matt thought. Matt got mad and had the elephant pull the tractor clear out the back door. He unhooked the chain, brought the elephant back in the ring and had the elephant bow to the audience. There was a thunderous round of applause. The announcer didn't say anything, he didn't have to. I don't know if the dealer was in the audience or not but I did not have a complaint.

Roger would paint the banners. We would pay Roger for that and Buster and I would cut the money 50-50. As long as he was there I got as much for my end or more than I paid him in salary.

Jack Mills had been a banner man before he owned a circus and Floyd King told me he was a great one. Floyd, who Jack worked for, credits him with starting phone promotions. He said Jack would get a roll of nickels, get in a phone booth, call some merchants instead of heel and toeing it. Then he'd go and pick up the copy for the ad and the money. If you ever visited Mills Bros. Circus you would see banners all around the tent. They had their phone men sell them in advance along with the tickets.

I finished the promotion in Cape Girardeau and it was very good. We had the Coffee Drinkers' Club which was made up of local businessmen and politicians. They were well thought of and did a lot of charitable work in the community. This was their first circus and they were pleased with the outcome. The committee man who I checked in with every day had an office equipment store across the street where I had the phone room. We became good friends. He was also the police commissioner which came in handy later.

Whitey Ford called to say he had some beautiful stationary made and we had our one and only disagreement. He said he had hired an artist to lay it out and he had given him a picture of Count Angelo Nicholas, the ringmaster, for it. He was worried it

might look too much like the Count, and did I think we would have any trouble with him. I said no. What I wanted to say was that Count had as big a ego as you do and he would be elated. I asked what this cost. When he said \$600, I said, "Are you crazy. Here I am trying to put out a circus as cheap as I can. I could have bought a used truck for that amount. From now on no money will be spent unless I ok it. In the first place we don't need any stationary, our agents go to the sponsors in person. The bill posters go to the newspaper and radio in person. We use the phone and Western Union with our promoters and sponsors. We could use Milner Hotel stationary."



The Duke of Paduach marquee and big top. Pfening Archives.

I put an ad in *Billboard*: "Want good butchers that can ask for money, good blue room I'll buy the first one." We had a lot of them stop by, some to work, some just to visit. Buddy Cantor said he would call a friend of his named Brooklyn Harry who was a good butcher and good on Chinese as the concession department had to put up the side show banner line and marquee.

A side show act called and said he did magic, a pin cushion act where he'd stick pins in himself, walk on glass, and do a karate act. He did not have a partner. His name was Howard Bone from Evansville, Indiana. I told him to come in. We now had a strong side show for a small circus with all that George did and now this, plus the three elephants and a burro that I kept from the animal farm. Roger was thrilled.

I had the acts come into winter quarters a week ahead of opening. I had plenty of places to park at the fairgrounds with lights and water. I wanted to see exactly what I had,

and planned to go to Poplar Bluff three days ahead of opening so we could take our time putting up and try to shake out the problems, because after that it was all one day stands. We were in good shape for drivers and actually I had more performance than I needed. That would soon change.

The first day when we put up the top and unloaded I realized there had to be some changes made quickly. I thought back when I was going to take the hippo on the Beatty show. I had to change the operation to make one day stands. On the carnival I hauled the banner line and ramps on the gator show wagon so I had to change to panels so everything would go on the hippo cage truck. Sure I could haul the circus from town to town with the trucks I had, but I couldn't get it up fast enough. I had to buy another truck the first day.

The opening day blues set in. It was June 15, 1960. Brooklyn Harry came in from New York, I gave him the floss. I had a nice little floss stand that I put in the middle of the midway. He was a big guy and sorta bullshit but he seemed to know a lot about concessions. He was cleaning his stand with a jug of Clorox, and said the health men liked Clorox and he always kept it in sight. He was also a back up driver. I was impressed. This was day two. The show was up. Whitey came in and was pleased with what I had put together. He went downtown to the local radio station and was interviewed which he did every day and it was terrific, all the towns we played had country western stations. Sometimes he would be on the air for a couple of hours. The bill poster laid the ads with the newspaper and radio stations, and set up the interviews. We had a \$75 newspaper and \$25 radio budget.

I went down to get something; all was fine, tomorrow was opening day. I was gone a couple of hours. When I came back to the lot there was no Brooklyn Harry and no Buddy Cantor. I asked around what had happened? Roger said you have



never seem anything like this, Brooklyn Harry got into a beef with Howard Bone, the side show man, who was of very slight build, and had threatened him. Roger said the little guy hit him, kicked him, and chopped him all the way down in the woods which was at the edge of the show lot. Harry came out of the woods got his things and he and Buddy left. Howard Bone sure knew karate. Buddy had been drinking heavy that day, but he had worked hard in quarters and cooked and had the cookhouse spotless, so I really didn't care. But I hated to lose him. Brooklyn Harry came all the way from New York and doesn't make opening day, and for Buddy to not stay after all the work, time, and effort he put in didn't make sense.

You try to figure it out. I can not. I told an old friend of mine about it many years later. He said, "Son, that's part of the business, it comes under the heading of 'fun, sport, pastimes and amusements.'" Looking back in this business I guess it does.

I have to buy a truck the first day now. I don't have a cook but that's not all. I give the cook house and blue room to Mary Carlton from the skating act. We later named her "Dirty Mary." I had strictly a working men's cook house except single performers, butchers and Roger's family because he had so much to do with his side show, mail and purchasing duties.

Our opening performance was going well but the light plant failed during Beatrice Dante's chimp act. Her nick name was "Madam Fi Fi." The electrician and I ran over to the generator and it was only off a couple of minutes. Of course the organ and lights went off. The lights were no big deal since it was a little after 2:00 pm, but Fi Fi threw her props out the back door, and put her chimps in her trailer. I stayed by the light plant as the electrician showed me what to do if it happened again. By the time the show was over Fi Fi had her things together, hooked up her trailer and as she pulled off the lot she yelled to me in her French accent "Bob why you don't check your fuses." She thought we had blown a fuse. I knew she was a little wacky, but I liked her anyway. I didn't care if she left. I didn't

need her anyway. She had a pink Cadillac and pink trailer. I used her many times after that on stage shows. Bill Webb, the electrician, went down between shows and bought a electric fuel pump. We did not have any more trouble and the generator was still on the show when I sold King Bros.



A Duke semi next to the big top. Pfening Archives.

Things were going along good after the first-day problems. We were getting it over the road, getting it up and getting it down. We picked up more help along the way and were making money. We were in Cape Girardeau which was booked about a week after opening in Poplar Bluff. The Coffee Drinkers' Club, our sponsor, was out in force and having a picnic under one of the sheds at the fairgrounds between shows. We put on a little unexpected and unrehearsed entertainment of sorts. Two workingmen got into a fight and one hit the other one with a wooden stake. The coffee drinkers said you could hear him scream all the way over at their shed. He was knocked out cold. I had gone uptown with my family to eat. When I got back I had one in the hospital and one in jail. The one in jail was a driver and I needed him. It was about time for the night show, so I couldn't do anything about it until after the show was over.

While the show was going on I talked to the police commissioner and explained that they were not drinking, which they weren't, and that they just got into an argument that got out of hand. Fights like this happen every day outside of show business. I told him circus people were citizens of towns just like his, but who don't fit in and like the nomad's life. Here they are fed and have a place to stay and somebody to take care of them. Show people are

family people. They send their children to school in the winter and on the road they home school them and use correspondence courses, and live in a regular community when they are not working.

I left money with him to take care of the hospital. He was not badly hurt, but was kept overnight for observation. I gave the police commissioner money to give the injured guy bus fare if he wanted to return to the show. I asked if I could get the other guy, the driver, out of jail that so he could help tear down and drive in the morning. "And by the way I would like to buy that safe you have in the window of your store." He said he would see what he could do.

After the show we went down to his store, loaded the safe in my station wagon, went down to the jail where he gave me my man, we go back to the lot, and he goes back to work. Another circus day is coming to an end.

The show was going great, we were down in southern Missouri and Illinois, big Duke of Paducah and Grand Ole Opry territory. Kernan visited a few days with his trailer. He liked the operation and gave me some much-welcomed tips and advice. I'm always hungry for knowledge. My parents always told me that when you think you know it all you only have one way to go, that's down. He suggested getting some red tee shirts for the workingmen and some regular colored shirts and black pants for the prop hands when they were working. In other words dress it up a little.

We were playing a town in Illinois near St. Louis. One morning (we didn't work on Sundays with this show) I was the only one left on the lot. I drove my truck with my trailer and my wife drove the station wagon with our two children. A highway patrolman knocked on my door to tell me that one of my trucks had run an intersection on the highway and the driver was in jail. He had no brakes, no lights (we didn't need lights because we moved in the day time) and no driver's license. Everything was no except it wasn't November. It was July. I told him I would follow



him, and told my wife not to worry I would be back later. I followed him down to the jail and told him I had the brakes fixed Saturday and had the bill to prove it. He said the court would be at 10:00 am Monday morning. I asked who the judge was. He gave me the name. I found out where he lived and a little bit about him. He was a widower. I went out to his house and when I told him my story, I got a lucky break. He was a Shriner, loved the circus and was always on the committee for the Shrine circus in St. Louis produced by Tom Packs. I explained that I had bought Tom Packs' concession trailer. I could tell he was a drinker and had had a few from his red face and nose. He was really a nice old man. I told him I had the brakes fixed the day before and showed him the bill. He said, "I know that man. I'll call him and get him down there and fix it." I explained I needed to take the truck to the next town. It was the pole truck and it also carried the tent and seats. If I didn't get it over there, I would be late for the set up and might miss the afternoon show and disappoint the children. He said he'd take care of it, and asked that I drive him to the courthouse. We got the man out of jail, called the arresting officer and the judge held court then, giving my driver a very light fine. The officer grumbled a little and the judge told him he was the judge in this courtroom. I could tell he didn't like the officer very much anyway. The officer said I should buy better equipment.

The judge called the garage man and had him come down and refix the brakes. I thanked the judge and told him I still didn't have anyone to drive except the man who didn't have a license. He said let him drive. I said suppose he gets stopped again? He said, "If you will bring me back, I will ride over with you and we will follow him." We got to the lot without incident. I said, "Judge how would you like to have a drink?" He said, "I wouldn't mind it son." I said I'd be right back, and would bourbon be all right? He said that would be fine. I went over to the cook house blue room and got a couple of miniatures and a 7 Up for a chaser. We had a drink and off we go back to his house. I kept in touch with him for several years and would send him some

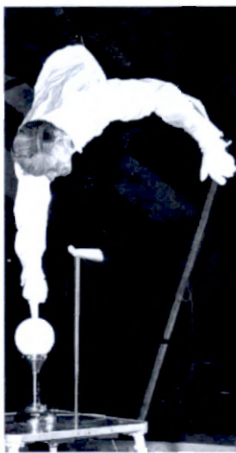
oranges in the winter time. I had learned that from the carnival fixers. The judge was really a friend to the circus man.

Bill Garvey came back on the show for a visit which I thought was great. He had not seen the show since we opened. The front end was in good shape and he said he had hired another contracting agent on a per-contract basis. I put Bill to work settling up with the sponsor, at which he was good, and helping me on the front door. Then he would go in and look at the performance twice a day, everyday. He was more of a circus fan than he was a circus man.

The Great Jessick doing his finger stand.

We were then in Tennessee. Just before opening doors for the afternoon show a bad storm came up and the wind started to blow. The side show was just finishing up and I had Roger announce on the mike that the afternoon performance was canceled. There would be a night show and for your own safety please leave the show grounds. We started pulling trucks around to tie off but we didn't have time. The wind hit at the front round end and the show went down. It was over in a matter of minutes. The middle piece over ring three was torn all to pieces beyond repair. Dick Loter's rigging, the two uprights, was already guyed out, and when the top came down it ripped it to pieces.

My partners Whitey Ford and Bill Garvey came out of hiding and said it's all over, let's pay off the people and go home. I said no we are going to give a show tonight. Pete March was still on the show but a young guy about the same age as me was the boss canvas man. His name was Emmet and was from Zanesville, Ohio. His nickname was Lushwell. He said, "I'm sorry boss that's the first time I ever lost one." I told him it wasn't his fault. All the stakes held, but all the ropes broke on the round end where the wind hit. It was an old top and the ropes were rotten. The good thing was we were in farm-



ing country and all of the little towns sold rope. I bought a coil of 3/4" rope. Matt, Pete and Emmett could splice rope and one of the butchers, who had been in the Navy, could also splice rope. They put in new rope where it was broken. We took out the back end seats, pulled the stakes in the back end, took out the back center pole, dragged the back round end and laced it to the center middle. We now had a 3 pole 2 ring show. We left the back end seats out since we didn't have time to put them back and make the night show. We didn't have

reserve seats that night. We gave the show and saved the advance promotion. The six years I had a tent circus I never missed a day that I had a promotion. I had to put it in a tobacco warehouse, in an empty hardware store, in the middle of the street and side wall it. I only blew two days in all that time and neither day had a promotion. I think that's a record.

We were not far from Memphis. I called Bob Ketrow in Miami where I had bought the tent and asked him to send me by air a thirty-foot middle piece. He had a lot of them. We played with a three pole top for two days and on the third day we were back in action like before.

Bill stayed on the show instead of going up front booking like he was supposed to. The new man wasn't working out. He was an old guy named Doc Holcamp. He was a friend of Bill and Si's and had been a minstrel at one time. We are getting behind in our booking, but Bill still did not want to go back up ahead.

We were playing a little town in Tennessee on an old softball field. There was a little wooden covered grandstand behind where home plate had been. I said, "Bill I want to talk to you a minute." I took him up in the grandstand where we sat down. I had a \$1000 bill and a \$500 bill in my wallet. I didn't carry my regular money in my wallet ever and still don't. I carry it in my right hand pants pocket. I said, "Bill do you see these?" I said they will take this circus anywhere I want to take it. "You have two choices, you either go up



ahead and start booking like you agreed to, or I am going to take this show to New Smyrna Beach." He went up ahead.

One day, I got a wire from Walter Kernan asking me to call him. He started out saying, "What I am going to tell you Bobby, I didn't have anything to do with it." He said the promoter who Floyd King had sent into Paducah, Kentucky called him and said we were going to play ahead of them and we had already worked the promotion. Floyd had told Frank McClosky about it and Frank was sending Howard Y. Bary, who was their press agent (he later worked for me), to blow me off the map and put in wait ads, saying wait for the big one. I thanked Walter for calling me, and told him I didn't know they were going to play it. But we had intentions all the time to play Paducah, wouldn't you if you had "The Duke of Paducah Circus." That's where he was supposed to be from. Walter said, "Of course, I just wanted to tip you off and tell you that I didn't have anything to do with it."

I called the sponsor and told them about it. I told them to call the local paper and tell it what was going to happen. I sent them an ad with a picture I had never used before, "Why wait, the best one is coming tomorrow." I really didn't care because we had already phoned the town in front of them and that was what actually mattered.

The picture I sent was of Unus doing his one finger stand, but I didn't use his name. I had acts come and go that summer. A man named Johnny Jessick from Youngstown, Ohio had been a night club act and this was his first circus. He did a head balancing act and he also juggled. I got two acts out of it. He was a nice man and stayed with me several years. One day I saw him practicing the one finger stand over at the edge of the woods. He had a nice little globe and stand. I went over and asked how long had he been doing that? He said he never put it in a show because he could only hold it a minute tops. I didn't care. I want to put it in the show. I told him I would give him a few extra dollars. From then on he was the Great Jessick, one

of the only men in the world who could balance on one finger. That was the picture and ad I sent to Paducah.

One time on King Bros. Chuck Schlarbaum was my band leader. Johnny got his finger stuck in the gimmick and had to walk out of the ring with the globe stuck on his finger. Chuck broke up laughing and couldn't play the trumpet. As Johnny walked by the band stand he hit Chuck over the head with the globe. Remember what my old friend said--fun, sport, pastimes and amusement--this is show biz.

There were three things I did every day as long as I had a circus. One, I always wore a shirt and tie and changed clothes twice a day. I wore a sport coat in the daytime and changed to a suit at night; 99% of the time I was better dressed than the sponsor. Two, I, or whoever was on the front door, thanked each person who went in for coming to the show. Three, I went downtown every morning and saw the Chief of Police (Sheriff if we were in the country), the Fire Department, health man, and the guy at the weigh station if it was on our route out of town. I gave them all free tickets, good for them and their families.



The Duke of Paducah Circus midway.

My pitch to the chief or sheriff was: "I have the circus that is in town today for the Lions Club (or whatever sponsor it was). We don't have any gambling or naked women, not that I am against it. We just don't have it. We are a family show (I said that in case they had been fixed before, and I didn't want to come off as a prude). I brought some free tickets for you and your help and I invite you to the show. Also, we picked up help from all over the country and like some of your citizens they get in trouble

sometimes. If this happens I would appreciate it if you wouldn't put them in jail, just bring them to me and I will take care of it."

I will never forget one sheriff in a little town in Tennessee. He had grayish red hair. When I got to the part where I said we don't have any gambling or naked women, he said, "Son, you don't have much of a show then. When I saw your posters going up I said to myself I am going to make a little money next week."

The show was in south Alabama when hurricane Donna hit south Florida. We had tornado warnings that night and we John Robinsoned the performance. Everyone pitched in and we got down fast and loaded. I pulled the show off the lot and took it downtown to a street with buildings on both sides. I went to the police station and told them if there was an emergency I would be glad to furnish my generator. They had it on the local radio that night and it made good public relations. Nothing happened and we left the next morning, but it made a good feeling, I imagine, for the next show that played there.

The show was booked into October with the last stand at Dunedin, Florida. I booked it on the phone because I had booked it for the stage show when Si and I were partners. It was the Grotto and I had worked the promotion twice myself.

We opened in Missouri then played Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, across the panhandle of Florida, with a couple of border towns in Georgia, down the west coast to Dunedin. I only wanted to stay out another two weeks, go down to south Florida and up the east coast and close in New Smyrna Beach. After the hurricane Bill and the other agents couldn't book anything. They said the sponsors were telling them they had a circus of their own with the hurricane. They killed a week and could not book anything. I said ok we will take three days off and we will jump into south Georgia, then come down the east coast. Bill didn't want to do it. I think Bill was more interested in building his house than he was booking the show. I said ok we close in Dunedin. I knew I was



through with this partnership.

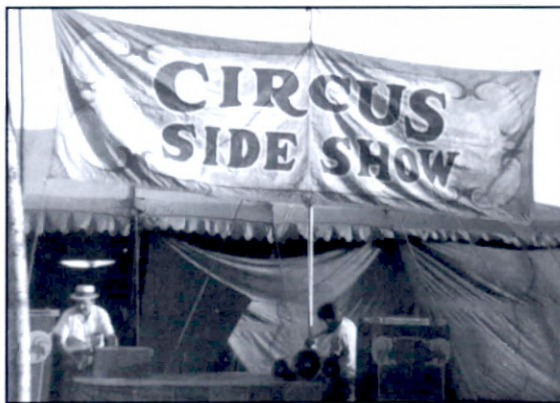
The deal with Whitey was from the start if he could not come because he had some fairs already booked he would send someone who had been on the Grand Ole Opry and instead of advertising the Duke of Paducah in person those days we would say we had a star from the Grand Ole Opry. He sent Lew Childre a lot. He was a great guy and a good trouper. He had been in vaudeville with a comedy and banjo act before going country western. He was good publicity. He was marketing his own fishing rod and had fished all over, recently fishing with Castro in Cuba.

For the last week he sent a young man named Danny Dill. He had just recorded a minor hit. Whitey lived up to his end to a T. He was a gentleman, a brother Shriner and a good showman. I had no problem with him. We had a sedan delivery for our billposters and he wanted it for his egg farm in Brentwood, Tennessee. His egg cartons had his picture on them and were sold all around Nashville. He liked to have his name and picture on things. If I wanted to up him for a little money for advertising, I would say, "What do you think about some posters with your picture in your green suit on them and we could put them all up and down Main Street." He'd say that's a good idea, let's do it. He wanted Danny Dill to drive the vehicle back to Nashville when we closed. Danny was sort of a wise guy and drank a little, but he didn't get out of line. He announced the show and did his act which was playing the guitar and singing a couple of songs.

One night he made a sort of sarcastic remark while announcing an act, which he thought was cute. I was standing in the back door and I told him we didn't do that on this show. He said, "I don't care. I'm through tomorrow night." I said, "No, you are through announcing right now. Give me the mike and from now on you just do your act. I announced the rest of the show and pressed Roger Boyd into action the next day.

I want to mention here about dear sweet Isla Garcia, our organist. Dick Loter's mother was our first organist. She said she would like to go back to Oklahoma when we started in Florida, but would stay until I got a

replacement. I was familiar with union halls because my wife had been a big band singer. I knew a lot of musicians; my brother was a union musician and had been drum major of the University of Kentucky marching band. His instrument was the trombone, and he also played in a dance band at county fairs.



The Duke side show entrance. Pfening Archives.

I called the union hall in Tampa and asked if they had an organist who played shows. They said they had a lady named Isla Garcia who every winter played the Ringling Bros. Circus rehearsals in Venice. I called her and offered her a little over scale, expenses and transportation. She had her own organ and big speakers, but no car. She said ok if I could get someone to cover for her weekend engagements at a restaurant that had its own organ. She made a deal. She was a widow and free to travel. I sent for her at once. She could read, fake and transpose, she was a great musician. She stayed the rest of the season. The five years I had the King show she went with me on my stage shows and stayed with me until she died. She was one hell of a find.

Closing night in Dunedin I left the tents up so they could dry before we rolled them up for the last time. I had a closing night party in the side show. I put down a little dance floor, and brought Isla's organ over so we could have some music. We had food, beer, wine and whiskey. Our cook at the time could play guitar real good and he and Danny Dill entertained.

But I must digress here and tell you about some of our previous cooks including "Dirty Mary" Carlton. She

took over the cook house and blue room the first day after Buddy Cantor left. I didn't have department heads on that show so I got all of the complaints. If they bothered the "Duke" I instructed him to refer them to me. I was getting complaints about her cleanliness, hence the name Dirty Mary.

I talked to her very diplomatically, I thought. I guess my diplomacy didn't work. The next day there were no Carltons. The cook house was locked, so we broke the lock. All of the dishes and silverware were gone and she had opened all the cans and dumped them on the floor. What a mess! She showed me how dirty she could be.

The next cook was a drinker, as it seemed all restaurant cooks were. He was drinking Aqua Velva after shave lotion and spilled a bottle in the dish water. We washed and washed but we could not get it out of the dishes, silverware and wash tub. I told him if he needed money for booze to come to me, no more shaving lotion.

Anyone who has had a circus will tell you a cook house is a pain in the ass.

Anyway, the closing party was going great and I made a little speech. I thanked everyone for a good season, and said we had a guitar playing cook who ought to be on the Grand Ole Opry and a Grand Ole Opry guitar player that ought to be a cook. I got a good laugh and made Danny Dill hot as hell, which was my intention. On the home run to New Smyrna Beach they wrecked the office truck, totaled the tractor, damaged the fifth wheel pin on the trailer, and the rider in the truck went to the hospital. I had the vehicle towed to New Smyrna Beach. The Duke of Paducah Circus season had come to an end.

I leased the back end of a trailer park outside New Smyrna for the trucks. It was the same place where I started putting the circus together that spring. I had told all of the phone promoters to be ready to go January 2, I didn't know what kind of



show we'd have, but it would be under phone promotion.

I knew I was not going to have Bill for a partner and as for the Duke, the title was easy to book and the publicity was great when we went down to the radio stations, but I was weighing it in my mind. Was it worth one third of the profits for the title and his one act? It really didn't matter much what the title was as long as it was under phone promotion.

Kernan and McClosky saw the success I had had with this little show, and they decided to try one for a few weeks in January 1961. Bill English, their side show manager, ran it and they settled on the title Sells and Gray.

They did not want to use their office because they were using it in winter quarters. I told Walter he was welcome to use ours but the fifth wheel pin needed fixing. He said that's all right, we will fix it. I was back and forth several times to Deland while they were framing the show. They were going to use their side show top for a big top. It was a 70' round end; mine was a 60'. George Warner, their big top boss, had come over to the Beatty show from

Ringling. He was a great boss canvas man, but could be a bit cantankerous. He balked when they wanted to cut down some of the Beatty show stringers to make seats for the little show and then make more for the big show. So I loaned them all of my seats. I got complaints from both of my partners for loaning them the equipment instead of charging them. They seemed to have forgotten all of the favors Walter had done for us.

I told them I did not want to continue with them and I wanted to make them a buy or sell proposition. I owned more of the show than they did anyway. The tractor and trailer I had from the animal farm, the generator and truck, the high school horse, burro and snake show I never put in the corporation to start with. They wanted to sell.

I called Walter and told him to talk to Frank and see if they wanted to buy my partners out and we would be three way partners. A couple of days later Walter called me and said Frank did not want to do it, but for me to go ahead and buy my partners out and he would be my silent partner. I would have rather had Frank in with it because any help I got from

Walter would not be a conflict of interest.

Two days later Walter called and wanted to know if I could come to Sarasota to discuss this new show. I said sure and went to Sarasota where Walter told me that Floyd King had leased the King Bros. Circus title to Remo and Tripoli Cristiani in 1959 and 1960. Kernan and McClosky found out he was the Cristianis' general agent and handling the agents, promoters, bill posters etc. They threatened to fire Floyd from the Beatty show if it didn't stop. You actually had to lease the title from his wife Vicky. When Floyd and Arnold Maley went broke with their show, Floyd put his house in Macon and the King Bros. title in her name. Arnold didn't, and he lost his house. Floyd was a cunning old dude. Frank said if you will take the King title we will be three way partners. I agreed, and it started from there. They told me to deal with King. I went to see Floyd in Deland where he worked out of his room in the winter time at the old Putnam Hotel, then to New York City, then to Chicago, Memphis and on to Tampa. He handled everything from those locations.

## **A NEW CIRCUS HISTORY "THE PERFORMERS"**

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Come one, come all, step right inside, the band's about to play.



# ON ROUTE TO THE GREAT EASTERN

## PART TWO

By William L. Slout

It was in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, that George W. DeHaven put together a circus in his name for 1865, taking Andrew Haight as a partner, marking Haight's entry into the circus field.

In his obituary of Haight, W. W. Durand called him the busiest man he ever saw. "He was as tireless as time itself. He was the hardest kind of worker, and the most loyal man to his employers. . . . He was esteemed and popular everywhere, and received large salaries--\$5,000 and \$6,000 the last few years, most of which he gave away. . . . He was a great-hearted man, true to his friends and forgiving to his enemies."<sup>1</sup>

Andrew Haight was born near Penn Yan, Yates County, New York, in 1832. His father was a successful merchant, so it was natural that he

Andrew Haight. All illustrations are from the author's collection unless otherwise credited.



expressed an interest in business early on. As a young man, he worked in the firm of Stewart & Herkimer in Penn Yan, where he exhibited exceptional qualities as a sales clerk. His next employment was with W. M. & E. H. Purdy, dry goods dealers of Elmira, for a large increase in salary. He was with this house until 1847, when his father, who had two flourishing stores in Dresden, induced him to take charge of one of them. When his father died in 1850, Haight was left to manage both establishments and conducted them successfully for two years.

Then, anticipating better opportunities in the West, he left New York state for Wisconsin. Upon moving to Beaver Dam, he entered into successful businesses, operating two large stores, speculating in real estate and constructing and keeping a hotel there--the Clark House, complete with a poolroom and gambling parlor. He also had a third store and hotel in New London, managed by his brothers.<sup>2</sup>

At the age of thirty-four Haight met George W. DeHaven, who inveigled him into putting up money and entering circus management as a partner. In light of all he had going for him, one wonders why he was interested in such a risky venture. With the war ending, he may have anticipated a box office bonanza from along the rivers, which in most areas had been restricted to only military traffic. And then, of course, the South was now opening up and anxious for traveling entertainments. In any case, because of DeHaven's uncanny ability to get money-men involved, he took the bait.

The 1865 touring season would be a marked change from the war years. At the outset, the Confederacy was finished; Sherman's drive through the Carolinas, the surrender at Appomattox and the final capitulat-

Geo. W. DeHaven & Co's

## UNITED CIRCUS,

Newly organized for the season of 1866 with a

### TROUPE OF STAR PERFORMERS

Unequaled by any Company Traveling.

Geo. W. DeHaven	Manager.
Levi J. North	Equestrian Director.
A. Haight	Treasurer.
J. H. Perkins	Leader of Brass Band.
A. T. Britton	Leader of String Band.
P. H. Beaman	1st clown.
W. McArthur	2nd clown.

Turn out, and all come and see the wonderful and astonishing feats of

**Mons. Signor Bliss.**



### WALKING A CEILING

FEET UP AND HEAD DOWN

And the FREE EXHIBITION, immediately before opening the doors of the afternoon performance.

### Mlle LOUISE,

The greatest Tight Rope performer in the world, will make an ascension on a single wire, three hundred feet in length from the ground to the top of the center pole 60 feet high from the ground. Remember, this performance takes place about 1 o'clock in the afternoon, and is free for all.

DeHaven newspaper ad used in Dubuque, Iowa in 1865.

ion on May 26 marked the end. Now the entire country was open for travel, albeit dangerous in many areas. Shows would quickly expand their routes southward.

At the beginning, at least, Haight and DeHaven had a small outfit--no menagerie, no bandwagon, and no ticket wagon. Band members paraded on horseback and tickets were



sold from a raised stand about five-feet square. No large number of horses was required since the circus was to be a boat show. DeHaven was the manager and Haight the treasurer. Levi J. North began as the equestrian director; W. McArthur, the ringmaster; and P. H. Seaman, Tom Burgess, and Albert Aymar, clowns. William Naylor did the principal hurdle and somersault work. Signor Bliss performed his ceiling walking act. In addition, there was a "Laughable Ballet Pantomime" performed by what appears to have been the ladies and youngsters in the company. Mlle. Louise ascended the wire outside the canvas, walking the distance of 300 feet to the top of the pavilion, some 50 feet above the ground.<sup>3</sup> Admission was set at 75 cents for adults and 50 cents for children.

The circus, under George W. DeHaven & Co.'s Great United, opened at Beaver Dam on the 10th of April, 1865, just four days prior to the shocking assassination of President Lincoln. Performers must have found it difficult to entertain a nation in mourning. Proprietors surely were discouraged by the distraction's temporary effect at the box office. But "the show must go on" is the everlasting slogan, and indeed it did.

For the remainder of April and into May, DeHaven & Co. played towns in Wisconsin and Minnesota. We are indebted to Dr. Robert Loeffler for research on DeHaven's activity in this part of the country. He states that the company was at St Paul on May 11, where it received a new canvas pavilion, which could indicate that things were going well. Certainly, they were well received there. "The fact is, a really good company is soon found out, and after the first performance on Thursday afternoon, the news spread over the city that DeHaven had to be the best circus ever brought to St Paul."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly, DeHaven & Co. moved down the Rock River on the *Jeannette Roberts* and stopped at places along the Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio and adjoining waterways. The show suffered a blow-down at McGregor, Iowa, on May 20th. It occurred around 10 p.m. while the minstrel concert was being performed. The storm came up with little warning, causing a great panic within the pavilion. There was thunder, lightning, the breaking of ropes and poles, until finally the tent collapsed on top of the people who had

not managed to escape to the outside. The canvas was greatly damaged by the broken poles and by knives of audience members anxious to get out from under. "Bonnets, hats, combs, coats, 'waterfalls,' 'rats,' (female names for hair appendages) and lots of curiosities were thrown to the winds and lost forever. The struggle to 'get out' was terrific, and oh how it blowed! Report says not less than 100 valuables were lost that night: some went into the river, some were mashed to pieces and some, we regret to say, were appropriated by DeHaven's company in picking up the canvas."<sup>5</sup>

The *Jeannette Roberts* steamed up the Missouri and arrived at Leavenworth on June 21, carrying one of the first circuses to enter Kansas following the war. That the show satisfied the entertainment-hungry population can be confirmed by the following passage from the *Daily Conservative* of the 22nd. "The seats were filled with some of our best citizens yesterday, and all seemed highly pleased. Those who do not attend the circus will miss a first-class performance. The audience filled the canvass to overflowing last night, and as everybody brings away

DeHaven ad used in Achinson, Kansas in 1866.

**GEO. W. DE HAVEN & CO.**  
**IMPERIAL CIRCUS**

Manager, G. W. DE HAVEN.  
 Treasurer, - FRED. OLIVER.  
 Leader of Or., Prof. B. HAZEN.  
 Master of Horse, M. FRAXIE.

A brilliant exemplification  
 of the old classic and modern  
 features of the

**HIPPODROME  
 AND  
 CIRCUS,**

In which the highest most  
 brilliant and intrepid perform-  
 ances,  
 Equestrian & Gymnastic,  
 are combined with the chaste  
 and elegant tout-ensemble of the  
 Parisian Amphitheater,

a good report, all would believe those who desire a seat to go early this afternoon and evening. This is their last day here."<sup>6</sup>

The show was heavily advertised in Kansas. Ads ran seven days in advance of the performance dates in the *Daily Conservative*. This was repeated in Atchison's *Daily Champion* for the appearance in that city. There, J. H. Owens erected a billboard 80 feet long and 12 feet high on the corner of Commerce and Second Streets and filled the space with the showy circus paper. It was announced that, after leaving Atchison, the circus would continue on the Missouri, stopping at St. Joseph for June 26 and 27, and then proceed as far north as Council Bluffs, Iowa, just across the river from Omaha. When the company returned down river, a second stop was made at Leavenworth on July 11, with the *Conservative* expressing gratification on the following day equal to that of the earlier stand. "The mammoth circus of DeHaven & Co. arrived at our levee on their return on time yesterday morning, and made a triumphant march through our city to their former place of exhibition. Both the performances in the afternoon and evening were well attended. By urgent request, and to accommodate a large number of soldiers, the circus will give three performances at the Fort today--at 9 1/2 a.m., 1 1/2 p.m., and 7 1/2 p.m. We advise all the boys in blue to attend, for it is the best circus ever in this part of the country."<sup>7</sup>

An unexpected and quite astounding episode occurred at the Fort. Following Mlle. Louise's outdoor exhibition on the wire, a drum major of the 14th Illinois Regiment stepped forward and announced he could do better. He was immediately challenged by one of the company, who offered to bet him \$25 that he could not walk ten feet up the incline. Boldly accepting the wager, the soldier pulled off his boots and mounted the wire in his stocking feet. The disbelieving showman then made the proposal that if he performed the feat successfully his entire regiment would be passed into the tent at no charge. With this, the soldier walked up the wire to the center pole, made an about face in military fashion, and began his descent. In an act of arrogance, about halfway down he stood on one foot, sticking the other out straight, and then sat down on the wire with both legs extended. After



arriving again on solid ground, he was greeted by lusty cheers from his comrades.

That evening the wire-walking drum major arrived with a number of his regiment expecting to be ushered into the tent for a complimentary performance. To his surprise, the circus people refused to honor their previous offer. With this, quite a row ensued. Four people were knocked to the ground, the treasurer's box was upset, and the canvas was ripped in places. Further damage was forestalled when the soldiers were finally let in.

There were more frightening encounters with local trouble-makers, incidents that occurred with greater frequency than in the past. The thousands of soldiers suddenly idled from their warring existence, still armed for battle, but trying to forget the nightmare memories of the last few years, created a volatile climate in isolated communities, suspicious of the encroachment of strangers. John Glenroy recalled that in Missouri nearly everyone carried revolvers and knives, whether on the street or in places of business, including waitresses at public dining rooms and barbers in their shops. "It was a common thing to see Negro women walking along the street carrying revolvers in their hands," he wrote.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, a Missouri city correspondent, referring to a visit there on June 17, disclosed that the show was "in receipt of lots of greenbacks."

DeHaven & Co. had a long jump on the *Jeannette Roberts* along the Ohio for an August date at Alton, Indiana. Because of arriving at their destination shortly before show time, Mlle. Louise's free act was omitted, as well as Signer Bliss' ceiling walking feat, with substitutes inserted in their stead. The next stand at Madison, Indiana, was over 150 miles from Alton, so a night performance was not given. Later, when the circus was loading onto its boat, some of the audience came around to express dissatisfaction. Included in this party were a number of soldiers. The demonstration ultimately became a nuisance to the loading process and DeHaven ordered the protesters off the boat. It appeared that the matter was settled; but, when the *Jeannette Roberts* steamed away, the soldiers reappeared and began shoot-



Pike's Opera House in Cincinnati, Ohio. *Harper's Weekly*, April 14, 1866.

ing in her direction. As the boat moved up the Ohio River, the soldiers followed at a distance, sporadically sniping at the pilot house. Although there were seventy or eighty shots fired into the moving craft there were no serious injuries to the passengers.

Early in August it was announced that the circus was to go from Cairo down river to New Orleans, then to Mobile and up the Alabama River to Montgomery. It would then switch to rail for passage to Augusta and Savannah. At this time the company consisted of Barney and Mrs. Carroll, Sam Lathrop, P. H. Seaman, Tom Burgess, Joseph Tinkharn, W. M.

Sketch of Pike's Opera House on fire. *Harper's Weekly*, April 14, 1866.



Johnson, Charley Rivers, John and William Naylor, L. B. Carr, Henry Burdeau, Signor Bliss, J. H. Pizzarro, George McDonogh, and Sam Rhinehart and his three boys.

At the end of October, Haight sold his hotel at Beaver Dam and bought DeHaven out at Vicksburg, Mississippi, because, it has been said, DeHaven did not consider it judicious to tour in the South. Haight would now go it alone, under the DeHaven title until the advertising paper was used up. The partnership had lasted barely a half-dozen months, but the pair would be together again for another venture in 1871.

With Andrew Haight buying George W. DeHaven & Co. in the fall of 1865, DeHaven now had cash to form another circus for the 1866 season. It was to become DeHaven's Imperial Circus, a title he would manage for the next half-dozen years. If there was a backer or backers for this at the outset, no name has surfaced; but he would need financial help even before the season opened. Poor DeHaven was prone to misfortune in his ventures of management. Before starting on the road in 1866, DeHaven's company was handed a considerable loss of advertising bills and cuts brought about from the burning of the *Enquirer* office in Cincinnati, along with other structures, a collateral casualty of the great Opera House fire.

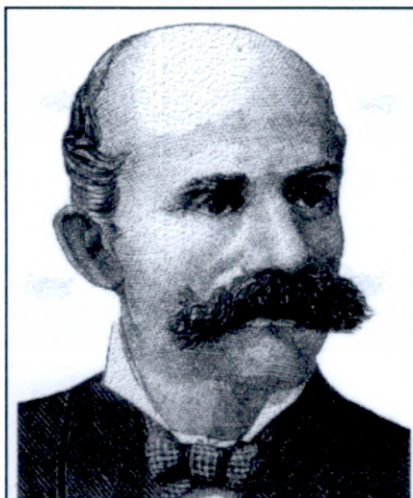
The fire broke out in Pike's Opera House, which was considered one of the most splendid venues of entertainment in the West. Although the building was completely destroyed, it was most fortuitate that the night's program--Midsummer Night's Dream--was over and the audience dispersed. It was thought that the conflagration was started about 11:30 p.m. by a gas explosion near the backstage scenery. The Cincinnati *Commercial* reported: "In five minutes the flames had wrapped the whole magnificent interior of stage and auditorium, and burst through the rear portion of the roof. On the wings of the draught thus provided, the flames shot up to a great height and lapped over upon



adjoining buildings. Soon huge masses of black smoke burst from the cornice of the Fourth Street front windows. At a quarter of twelve the scene was exciting in the extreme. The half square bounded by Fourth, Vine, Baker, and Walnut streets had a dome of luridly gleaming flames, through which columns of smoke shot up, and from which showers of sparks and bunches of flames floated upward and then descended upon the burning mass below. The dome and ceiling, with their gorgeous and artistic ornamentation, fell with the roof with a terrific crash, and there burst upward a dazzling light, blinding in its intensity. Slowly but surely the fire crept down through the various stories of the edifice--through offices and studios--steadily down to the magnificent stores, running the entire length of the building on the first floor of Fourth Street into the wealth of literature, the tens of thousands worth of books of CARROLL's store, the valuable stock of SUNNER'S sewing machines, the fine music-store of W. C. PETERS, and Philip Philip's pianos, the immense goods stored in the Adams Express rooms, the college rooms of BRYANT, STRATTON, & DE HAN's Commercial Institute, the editorial room of the National Union. HARPEL'S job printing establishment, with its valuable machinery, and all the dozen offices besides.

From the real and west side of the Opera-house the flames marched with overwhelming strength to the extensive stables of the Adams Express Company and the buildings of the Cincinnati *Daily Enquirer*. The fall of a large mass of wall upon the rear of the Enquirer building insured its partial destruction, and soon the flames were communicated to the rear of the first and second floors, and rushing onward crept through the front windows, and told the story of their power to the fireman, who crept up to grapple with them. But with the same power already so terribly used the devouring flames wrapped the structure in their embrace, and the work of destruction was soon far advanced through the job rooms, where were stored nearly \$100,000 worth of cuts; through job-presses, and composing rooms of JONES & HART--all totally destroyed."<sup>9</sup>

The loss was estimated at \$1,751,000, over half of which was Pike's Opera House. However, for DeHaven's circus, scheduled to open



George Batcheller.

on May 5, it was a setback of about \$8,000. As if this was not enough, the specially made pavilion, a \$3,000 value, was ignited by a spark from the engine and burned on its railway car while en route to St. Paul. Although it was fully insured, the accident delayed the opening. An item in the *Pioneer* of May 6 read, "Notwithstanding the reverses sustained by the Company, they are all still undaunted, and busily making arrangements for their summer tour."<sup>10</sup>

The 1866 season was eventually launched at Minneapolis on May 21 with new canvas, new seats and other new paraphernalia, and with a strong troupe of performers. There were the internationally recognized equestrienne Madame Louise Tourniaire and her brother, hurdle

William Dutton.



rider Theodore; Mlle. Kate Bailey, wire-walker and ascensionist; gymnasts Louis B. Carr and Henry Burdeau; rider William Dutton; leaper George Batcheller; acrobat Burnell Runnells and his two boys; somersaulter Sam Rhinehart; and two experienced clowns in William Worrell and P. S. Seaman. Fred Bailey was the agent.

The artistic level of the company was immediately confirmed by the St. Paul *Pioneer and Democrat* of May 23. "We believe it is the opinion of all who were present that the performance of this Company cannot be equaled. Madame Tourniaire, Master William Dutton, and Monsieur Burnell fully sustained their high reputation, while the two boys, sons of Monsieur Burnell, excited the wonder and admiration of all."<sup>11</sup>

Following the St Paul opening, DeHaven & Co., a river show, played dates in Minnesota and Wisconsin; then in June, moved down the Mississippi, stopping at the major junctions along the way--Dubuque, Davenport, Rock Island, Burlington, Hannibal, etc. We learn in a report from the latter city that the June 14 performance there was highly rewarding. "Occasionally Hannibal, like larger cities, is favored with a first class circus. Geo. W. DeHaven & Co.'s Imperial Circus exhibited here last night, and we can say without fear of contradiction, that it was the circus of the season." The writer found Mine. Tourriair to be a woman "of noble beauty and pleasing address" and the most accomplished equestrienne presently before the public. William Worrell was considered "the only witty, chaste and original jester" who has appeared in Hannibal in many years. Also commended was the riding of William Dutton, George Batcheller and Henry North, but the highest praise was saved for a trio of gymnasts, Burnell Runnells and his two little boys in classic groupings and posturings.

In late June, DeHaven & Co. moved up the Missouri to St. Joseph, Leavenworth and Kansas City, also drawing approval from the local scribes. "DeHaven says he has the best organization which has ever exhibited in the West," wrote a man from the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, "and after witnessing the performances yesterday we believe him." Mine. Tourniaire's skills on an unbridled barebacked horse "were absolutely thrilling," and her



menage act excelled anything seen before.<sup>12</sup>

But on July 1 an item appeared in the *Conservative* that for barely a year after the war is to this writer utterly astounding and admirably bold; and we feel compelled to enter it here in its entirety. "Now that DeHaven's circus has closed its performances here, we have an opportunity to make some suggestions relative to the conduct of circuses in general, without rendering ourselves liable to the imputation of a design to injure the business of this particular one.

"Since the days when the glaring and highly colored bills of these shows filled our youthful breast with admiration, and awakened therein a painful longing, which could only be satisfied with the realization of the promised pleasure—we say, since those days we never recollect of having never attended a circus in which the negro, or 'nigger,' as the disciples of the saw-dust circle classically name him, was not made the target of the coarsest allusions, and the victim of barbarous jokes which had not wit enough to redeem them from absolute blackguardism.

"It is time these low-lived and beastly practices be stopped. When colored men, and women, and children visit a circus, they pay their money like white folks, and we have always observed that they behave themselves equally as well. The badge of inferiority is made sufficiently apparent by huddling them together in a particular portion of the amphitheatre, without subjecting them to the brutality of those fellows in striped garments, who, being employed to play the fool, generally seem to be qualified by nature for the role. The sort of humor which delights in ridiculing a poor and defenseless people never excites the risibilities of the true lady or gentleman, and is scarcely ever met save with the loud guffaw of the shameless courtesan, and the masculine blackguards who are equally shameless.

"When one of DeHaven's clowns perpetrated the stale pun, 'You can rob a white man of his last penny, but you can't rob a nigger of his last scent,' the decent portion of the audience seemed to shudder, while the portion that was not so decent were in ecstasies. And when the same clown, seeing a respectably dressed and modest appearing colored woman walking around the side of

the amphitheatre towards the place assigned to her, pursued her with his mock and insulting manner, he should have been forthwith hissed from the ring.

**Geo. W. De Haven's**



**IMPERIAL CIRCUS.**

**A GRAND MAMMOTH SHOW!**

DAVID GUERIAN, Proprietor.  
 GEO. W. DE HAVEN, Manager.  
 J. B. OLIVER, Treasurer.  
 OLIVER BELL, Equestrian Director.  
 H. F. NICHOLS, Master of Circle.  
 J. O. DAVIS, General Agent.

**A Grand Free Exhibition.**

THE FAIRY ASCENSIONIST,  
**Miss Annie Worland,**  
 Before the opening of the doors of the Circus, MISS ANNIE will perform the difficult and perilous feat of walking from the ground to the top of the enormous pavilion, on a SINGLE WIRE!  
 This is one of the most difficult feats ever attempted by any person in the profession.

DeHaven ad used in 1867. Circus World Museum collection.

"This is not the day, nor is Kansas the place for such exhibitions of contempt for the negro. They belong to the age of woman-whipping and baby-selling, and seem to be perennial in a Kentucky or South Carolina climate. The people here are inclined to let the negro alone, to protect him from oppression, to encourage him to honest industry, and to afford him every facility for improving and elevating his condition by his own exertions. Being so disposed, no one approves this abuse and ridicule of the negro, except such as have reason to be jealous of his superiority.

"As a whole, Mr. DeHaven's circus is one of the best that travels, and we only throw out these hints that it may be still further improved by the elimination of these obnoxious features, and that those which aim to follow may avoid their use."<sup>13</sup>

July was an unfortunate time for DeHaven & Co. An accident befell the show in Kansas City where several people were injured when on

July 2 a section of the seats collapsed. At Waverly, Missouri, on the 9th the troupers were attacked by a party of ruffians and robbed of their money and watches. "The attack was unprovoked on the part of the circus company, being made while they were passing through the town on the way to their boat." Four of the group were captured.<sup>14</sup>

At St. Louis, the stand was advertised for three days beginning July 16, with the proceeds of a July 18 performance to be donated to the relief of Southern sufferers. But the actors, having not seen salaries for some time, balked at participating in such a charity. The *Missouri Republican* reported the disagreement the following day.

"Yesterday afternoon a large crowd gathered under the spacious canvas of DeHaven's circus to witness the performance, which, however, owing to an unforeseen imbroglio between the actors and the proprietors, did not take place. It appears that a strike took place among the former and they refused to go on through their evolutions. The origin of the difficulty is said to be arrears of salary due to the actors. The proceeds of the performances were said to be given to the Southern Relief Association. The employees proposed to the proprietors that if they would rescind this decision and distribute the amount among them they would go through with the performance and do their best to please the assemblage. The proposition was refused, and negotiations were broken off between the belligerent parties, and the authorities were informed that the exhibition could not go forward, and that the admission money would be returned at the entrance, which was done without serious trouble, except sundry expressions of disapprobation on the part of small boys."<sup>15</sup> With the assistance of the sheriff, who impounded some of the horses, the company prevailed on management to make a settlement in their favor.

Instead of three days, the show remained a week and then suspended to reorganize. Henry Burdeau and H. C. North left to connect with Haight & Chambers. William Dutton and John Murphy joined Lake's Hippo-Olympiad in Illinois. The featured performers now consisted of Mme. Tourniaire and daughter, Burnell Runnells and two sons, and Le June Burt. On leaving the city, Messrs. Louder and Webb were the managers and a Mr. Cropsey was



said to have put up some money. Shortly, Webb withdrew.

After a stand in Cairo, DeHaven & Co. went up the Ohio River, working towns on both the Ohio and Kentucky sides--Paducah, Henderson, Evansville, Louisville, etc. Then, in early September, our boat travelers turned south on the Tennessee and, following a series of estuaries, ended up at Nashville for a four-day stop. According to the *Clipper*, the show returned to the Ohio and made a final run up as far as Cincinnati. This presumably ended the season. In October it was reported that: "Taken altogether the season has been a prosperous one, and but two companies have met with bad business. These are the Thayer & Noyes party and George DeHaven's Show."<sup>16</sup> Poor DeHaven had done it again.

After closing, DeHaven arranged the construction of what was described as a "commodious and comfortable" amphitheatre in St. Paul, on Sixth Street between Minnesota and Wabash, where a series of entertainments was initiated during the Christmas holidays. DeHaven was the manager; C. R. Haines, the treasurer; William Dutton, equestrian manager; H. F. Nichols, master of the circle; and P. H. Seaman, the clown.

The circus building was erected with local money; and, according to the home town paper, DeHaven took unto himself a local bride. "Mr. George DeHaven having married one of our St. Paul girls is now a St. Paul man. Vetale Guerin, David Guerin, John B. Oliver and others are all St. Paul residents and having few amusements here during the winter months deserve well for setting up at such expense a comfortable and respectable place of amusement. Those who are fond of the sports and arts of the ring will find a visit to DeHaven's a pleasant way of spending an evening."<sup>17</sup>

The regular season began on Tuesday, January 1, 1867, with performances every Wednesday and Saturday. A week later an item in the *Pioneer* informed the residents of St. Paul: "The Imperial Circus under the auspices of DeHaven & Co., consisting of some of the most enterprising citizens, has been opened with signal success, and its managers feel gratified with the results. During the holidays they had crowded houses, and both nights of last week were more than satisfactory. Messrs. DeHaven

**WAIT FOR THE BEST.**

**The Greatest Show in the World**

**Orphan Asylum Lot—3 Days Only.**

**THURSDAY, FRIDAY & SATURDAY,**  
September 16, 17 and 18.

**GEORGE W. DE HAVEN'S**  
**COLOSSAL CIRCUS,**

WITH

The Best Equestrians,  
The Best Gymnasts,  
The Best Acrobats,  
The Best Amateurs,  
The Most Wonderful Children, and  
The Best Clowns in the World.

Headed by the Champion Clown of the Universe,  
**JIMMY REYNOLDS,**  
THE CLOWN PAR EXCELLENCE.

**AMONG** the Troupe of Gymnasts are the  
great sensation artists, the  
**RUNNELLS FAMILY,**

DeHaven ad used in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1869

& Co. have spared no pains and expense to make the hippodrome attractive, and we do not hesitate to commend it as a proper place for parents and children to spend an afternoon or evening."

On January 16 the paper abruptly announced that the company had deferred its weekly performances until the arrival of their entire equestrian troupe, which was to be within a few days. What is happening here? The reopening did not occur until January 26. But to everyone's misfortune, on about 10:30 that evening a fire broke out in the Mansion House on the corner of Wabash and Fifth Streets. The building was completely destroyed within a few hours. Two fire engines responded to the call, but, once at the site, had difficulty in getting a sufficient amount of hose, losing some twenty minutes before water could be applied. The building was nothing but a pile of ashes by 1:00 a.m. The circus performers who were staying there suffered losses, the greatest being to P. H. Seamon and the Milson Brothers, whose several hundred dollars worth of wardrobe was committed to the pyre; although a benefit given for them a week later helped to allay the calamity. An item of the had arrived.

And another on February 1 issued high praise for the company and announced that "the clown who was burnt out at the Mansion house and lost all he had is to have a benefit on Saturday night, when we bust he will have a good house."

The six-week winter season ended on March 24 unprofitably. According to the *Clipper*, "Financial misunderstanding in a number of places had a bad influence when ventilated by newspapers, which led the people to think that his show 'did not amount to much,' which partially explains the circus' dilemma." But quite the contrary, the item went on to explain, "he gives a good performance, and has talent that will compare favorably with any in the saw-dust arena."<sup>18</sup>

DeHaven's Imperial Circus went on the road under the proprietorship of David Guerin and Charles F. Haines for the 1867 summer season, this time by rail (by July 19 Haines was no longer a partner). DeHaven was manager; J. B. Oliver, treasurer; Oliver Bell, equestrian director; and H. F. Nichols, master of the ring; C. McCumber, director of advertising; J. O. Davis, general agent; and the performing roster included several of the people who had been a part of the winter season. Admission was 50 cents and 25 cents.

The show was at St. Paul on May 18. Dates followed in Minnesota and Wisconsin. We can get an idea of the circus program from a May advertisement for Oscoola Mills, Wisconsin. The ad revealed the following entertainments. Annie Worland made the outdoor ascension to the music of Capt. J. Ollerenshaw's Metropolitan Opera Band. Within the pavilion she rode the principal act, leaping through banners and other standard feats of that genre, and later showed her ability on the slack-wire. DeHaven, billed as "The most Thorough, Practical, Efficient and Humane Horse Tamer on the Continent," exhibited the trained horse, Pilot. Mine. Worland was featured for her daring and accomplished feats of equestrianism. William Dutton, her counterpart, performed on his flying barebacked steed and, in addition, made a leap for life from a spring-board. Oliver Bell did his specialty of throwing a somersault through a hoop lined with pointed daggers. The Milson Brothers presented a variety of gymnastics, acrobatics and muscular achievements. P. H. Seaman was



back heading the clown department, assisted by W. A. McArthur. Lafontaine Brothers, Henry and Alfred, added their gymnastic and acrobatic elements as well. Finally, there was Master Henry, a "juvenile prodigy," working the horizontal bars.<sup>19</sup>

Who was this Master Henry? He could have been one of the aforementioned Lafontaines or possibly the seven-year-old son of Vital Guerin. Loeffler has noted that young Henry Guerin performed the free act of walking a rope to the top of the tent at St. Paul. With his brother, David, as part of the DeHaven cavalcade, it is logical for the boy, if talented in that direction, to be with it.

The show crossed Michigan on its way to Canada and Maine. A July date in Detroit was well attended and well received. After Maine the company backtracked across Canada, where there was a switch to wagon travel before alighting again on U. S. soil at Ogdensburg, New York, on September 17. More dates in New York state followed.

The season was marred by the death of Oliver Bell. He drowned, supposedly by walking off the boat in the darkness of the night while the company was crossing Three Rivers in Canada. Sadly, his body was not found until five days later, washed some three miles below the place of crossing. It was buried in a small community near the spot of discovery.

William Shephard was the money man DeHaven unearthed for the 1868 season. Under his proprietorship, DeHaven was manager; R. D. Moody, treasurer; Oliver Dodge, ringmaster, Frank Equirrel, band leader; and C. McCumber, general agent. Admissions were 40 cents and 25 cents. Featured in advertisements were Charles Bliss, the human fly, and his sons Albert, Charles and George; the Worland family, Mme. Jerry Worland, Annie and little Johnny, back for a second season; Madame. Bridges, the celebrated bareback and pad rider from Paris; E. Scofield and Gillum, acrobats; Joseph Tinkham, hurdle rider; Luke Rivers, scenic rider; DeHaven's trick horse, Pilot; and a school of trained horses. J. C. Wallace and Gus Lee were the clowns, "who vie with one another in witty sayings, and it is difficult to decide which of them bears away the palm." The outside attraction was performed by Annie and Johnny Worland.

DeHaven & Co. started out at Macomb, Illinois on May 1 and followed with dates in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. W. Quinette Hendricks was with the company, giving us the only personal recollection of the season. We repeat it here with the warning to the reader that his recollections are sometimes suspect. He stated that he joined at Cincinnati on April 24 as clown and talker for the side show. Travel was by steamboat on the Ohio and Mississippi, the *Will S. Hayes*, a stem-wheeler equipped with a caliope. The incomplete routing information available confirms there were dates along the Mississippi in May.

**AT CLINTON ONE DAY ONLY!**  
**Wednesday, May 18, 1870.**  
**Great SENSATION CIRCUS!**  
**The Great Show of the Period**

Re-dressed, re-arranged and re-organized, with new and startling specialties for the spring and summer season of 1870.

**Supervisory Department:**

GEO. W. DEHAVEN, Manager	HERMAN
R. D. MOODY, Treasurer	F. B. CALDWELL, Asst. of Genl.
OLIVER DODGE, Ringmaster	B. H. JORDAN, General Agent
B. E. J. MILES, Asst. Treasurer	C. McCUMBER, Contracting Agent



**M'LE ZULEILA,**  
The Celebrated Female Gymnast and Aerial Artist.  
**Miss KATE STOKES,**  
The Charming Equestrienne.  
**THE WONDERFUL ELLA**



**M'LE LE BURTE,**  
The celebrated Dramatic and Equestrian Artist.  
**S. Q. STOKES,**  
With his European Troupe of Trained Ponies.  
**Mr. Charles Lowery,**  
The Celebrated Horseman.  
**MONS. SEVILLA,**  
The renowned Equestrian, from the Cirque Napoleon, Paris.  
**James Wilson,**  
The Leading Equestrian.  
**DAVENPORT BROTHERS,**  
In their wonderful Arabian Feats.  
**SIGNOR BLISS,**  
"The Man Fly," in his startling and Miraculous Antipodal Feats.  
**Mons. Ricardo,**  
The Modern Hercules, in his wonderful Athletic Feats.  
**BLISS BROTHERS.**

DeHaven ad used in 1870. Circus World Museum collection.

Hendricks stated the show arrived at Milwaukee by rail on July 4. "We remained there for on whole week while the company was getting a steamer ready for us to make a tour of the lakes. When the steamer arrived from Chicago, the *John J. Rowe*, they put all the show aboard her, horses and all. She was a large boat, driven by propeller. So we took that boat and went on a tour of the lakes, making all the towns on Lake Michigan, Lake Superior, Lake Erie,

and arriving at Buffalo, New York, we took railroads again and toured the eastern states."<sup>20</sup> This included various towns in Canada.

At Buffalo, where the tent was pitched on the corner of Niagara and Pearl Streets, the August 5 *Courier* rated the performances "of the finest order of merit." The writer was impressed with Annie Worland, who, speeding around the ring "was the most graceful little creature imaginable." She appeared on the tight-rope "with a recklessness and abandon never seen equaled, and which is especially remarkable considering her tender years." Charles Bliss' ceiling walking also caught his attention. "Many think this part of the performance is a humbug, merely put upon the bills to draw a crowd, but we can assure all doubters that Mr. Bliss really performs the feat. How he does it is a mystery." The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported on August 8 that the show had appeared the previous day to a "fair audience" and had given "universal satisfaction."

September found the show in Michigan. After arriving in Flint by railroad on September 8, rainy weather eliminated an afternoon performance. A further unfortunate situation was caused by competition with Yankee Robinson's circus, which was billed to be in Flint on the 22nd. The rivalry continued with the route through Fenton, Clinton, Ann Arbor, Howell, etc.

A *Clipper* item in July stated the season for tented shows suffered from unfavorable weather. From the outset there was a disagreeable cold spell accompanied by constant rain. Many of the roadways were either cut up or washed away, forcing delay in movement and, in some cases, canceled dates. "George DeHaven commenced at Macomb, Ill.," it read, "but has not made any money."<sup>21</sup> We suspect that he continued throughout the tour before going into winter quarters at Lincoln, Illinois.

Alderman and Ladd were the proprietors for DeHaven & Co.'s Combination Circus for 1869. As usual, DeHaven was manager. In addition, there were William Alderman, treasurer; Barney Carroll, equestrian director; Prof. Fisher, band director, Sam Joseph, general agent. Mme. Eloise Bridges returned as the principal equestrienne. In addition, there were the Lazelle Brothers, the Carroll family, Joseph Tinkham, Oliver Dodge, clowns Sam



Lathrop and William Anderson, etc. Charles Meyers, with his educated hog, had the side show.

The season began at the Academy of Music in Bloomington, Illinois, for a week on the 19th of April. On the 26th the circus opened under canvas at nearby Lincoln. "DeHaven's Imperial Circus which has been quartering in this city during the past winter, gave the first exhibition under canvas on Monday last. They gave a very creditable performance."<sup>22</sup>

Although the routing information available for 1869 is sketchy, we can presume that from Lincoln, which was located along Salt Creek, the company navigated the Sangamon and Illinois rivers, then up the Ohio and Mississippi, making use of the *Will S. Hayes*, a stem-wheeler equipped with a calliope, as they played towns in Illinois and Iowa during April and May.

Minnesota and Wisconsin were visited in June and July. At an appearance in St. Paul on June 10 the sheriff intervened and held the outfit for a debt that DeHaven had run up three years prior, this due to an unpaid bill for costumes and the unfortunate burning of the canvas and advertising paper.

The Minneapolis *Tribune* recorded the event. "After the performance last night Deputy Sheriff Grace attached the canvas of DeHaven's Circus to satisfy a claim of \$400 held by Charles Lacker: a tailor on Jackson Street, who made costumes for DeHaven in 1866. . . . The claim might, perhaps, be settled, were it not that other attachments to the amount of several thousand dollars await the result of this, to be laid upon the same property." DeHaven protested, claiming he did not own the show, but merely received salary for his services. The matter was said to have been "privately" settled.<sup>23</sup>

Travel in Minnesota and Wisconsin took up most of June and July. Indiana and Ohio were visited in August and September. A *Clipper* reporter stated that the company had enjoyed good business since entering Indiana, and added, "They have one of the best railroad shows I have ever seen."<sup>24</sup> The quality was enhanced at this time by the addition of the Runnells, family and popular clown Jimmy Reynolds.

The Cincinnati *Daily Enquirer* reported a three-day stand in that city, September 16-18, to have pleased and delighted audiences.

"Among the attaches of this organization will be found the most famous artists that have ever visited this city." The act of child rider, little Annie Carroll, and the feats of Burmell Runnells and sons drew special mention. On the third day of the engagement the proceeds of the two performances were to be the rewards of a benefit tendered to the general agent, Sam Joseph.<sup>25</sup>

The tour ended at Springfield, Ohio, on November 15. A reference to DeHaven & Co. in a *Clipper* summary of the circus season in late October was in conflict with the positive newspaper accounts. "The receipts of this show have been too small to allow a profit to anyone."<sup>26</sup> Sadly, it was a typical ending for poor DeHaven.

DeHaven went out for the season of 1870 in partnership with Robert Edgar Jackson Miles of Cincinnati, the second of the Great Eastern trio to be introduced. Miles was born at Culpepper Court House, Virginia, in 1835. After receiving a good education, at the age of eighteen he accepted a job as school teacher at the first free school established in Covington, Virginia, and some time during his two-year tenure attained the position of principal. During this period he organized a dramatic club, consisting of local people, and went on the stage in various leading roles.



R. E. J. Miles.

Durand noted that in 1855 a Mr. McKinney of Columbus, Ohio, offered him the management of the obscure Mathias & Co.'s Circus. The opportunity holding more possibility for excitement than his pedagogic duties, he accepted and for two years successfully conducted the business.

An item in another publication contradicts this, claiming he organized an Uncle Tom's Cabin Co. in 1855, which proved very profitable.

Following, with experience as an amateur actor behind him, he appeared on the professional stage in 1857 and within five years became one of the pioneers of "horse dramas" in the West, introducing for the first time his celebrated steed, "Minnehaha." Soon after this he brought out Adah Isaacs Menken in *Mazeppa*, which proved one of his most successful ventures financially.

*Mazeppa* was a popular equestrian drama, adapted from Lord Byron's lengthy poem, published in June of 1819. Byron had based his *Mazeppa* on Voltaire's *History of Charles XIII, King of Sweden*--which, in turn, was taken from a real life incident. The drama was especially popular when the hero was portrayed by an actress, who sensationalized it in wearing fleshlings that simulated nakedness and displayed every contour of the body. Charlotte Crampton (Mrs. Wilkinson) was the first of a line of female Mazeppas, described as a petite young woman, with an exquisite form and handsome face. She made her debut in the role on January 3, 1859, at New York's Chatham Theatre, where she introduced her trained horses, Alexander and Black Eagle. Perhaps in an attempt to outdo her male counterparts she went up the "run" without being lashed to the horse, a feat that had not been done before in the piece.

The most noted of these male imitators was Adah Isaacs Menken. It wasn't until 1861, however, that she became an overnight star by performing in *Mazeppa, the Wild Horse of Tartary* at the Green Street Theatre in Albany. This was followed by tours in the United States and Europe, earning for her the highest salary paid to an actress at that time. Some other female Mazeppas followed--Kate Fisher, Helene Smith, Kate Vance, Fanny Louise Buckingham, Kate Raymond, Madame Sanyeah, etc.

Miles left the stage for a short period to take advantage of the oil fever sweeping the country, investing all of his savings in a refining company at Vanceburg, Kentucky. But after a few months he determined it was not the financial bonanza he expected.

So, much the poorer but much the wiser, he returned to the stage and performed in nearly every large city



in the United States and Canada, amassing a considerable fortune. "Colonel Miles in Mazeppa was for years one of the best known characters on the stage," M. B. Leavitt wrote in his *Fifty Years in Theatrical Management*. "His Dick Turpin was regarded as a marvelous bit of acting in those days and he brought out a score of other characters compelling the admiration of the public by the artistic excellence of his impersonations."

In 1867 he took over the Cincinnati's National Theatre, where he offered to the public such stars as Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson and Edwin Forrest. So in 1870, as DeHaven's partner, he brought with him solid experience in matters of theatrical presentation and management.

Early advertisements listed a strong company of equestrians, athletes and gymnasts. Included were the aerobatic feats of the Davenport Brothers; Mlle. Zulella, female gymnast and "aerial fairy" Kate and Ella, the beautiful equestrienne daughters of Spencer Q. Stokes; Mlle. Le Burte, "dramatic and equestrienne artist;" S. Q. Stokes and his trained ponies; riders James Wilson, Charles Lowery and Mons. Vantini; Signor Bliss and family; Mons. Ricardo, a "Modem Samson;" and clowns Jimmy Reynolds, P. H. Seamon and Mons. Vantini. The educated horse, Comet, made his return, supported by two mules, Humpty Dumpty and Shoo Fly. A special feature was a production of *Mazeppa*, with Mlle. Le Burte in the title role.

DeHaven's *Mazeppa* was obviously advertised to take advantage of this contemporary craze. It was probably proposed by Miles, who quite suitably arranged and staged it, drawing on his experience as a horse drama performer and former touring star in the piece. But for now, it was Mlle. Le Burte who carried the show, which was presented, an ad read, "with their magnificent wardrobe in all its splendor and grandeur." This may have included the costumes that Miles had used for his touring production some years earlier.

The circus featured a balloon ascension as an outdoor free act, replacing the traditional wire-walking. The balloon had become a popular attraction in the years following the Civil

War, and DeHaven & Co. was the first circus to use it. W. W. Durand, in his brief biography of Miles in the 1872 Great Eastern route book, makes the forceful claim that R. E. J. Miles was "the undisputed father of the sensation, and to him alone is the credit due."<sup>27</sup> The practice began this season with no fanfare and seemingly no thought of it being innovative. The first indication of its use was carried in the *Clipper* of that year. "One of the aeronauts connected with DeHaven's Circus was recently severely injured by falling from the balloon into a summer house at Davenport, Iowa, and his substitute was drowned at Dubuque by falling in the river, we are informed."

The company moved along the major rivers that bordered Iowa, Illinois and Indiana on the boat *Victor* #4.<sup>28</sup> At Quincy on June 3 the event brought a large crowd to the grounds for the afternoon show. According to the *Daily Herald's* report of June 4: "At the appointed time the balloon, inflated with heated air, rose majestically upward for a few hundred yards, and floated off in an eastern direction, and came down with a rush in the vicinity of the hospital. Prof. Strong, who was in the basket, was jammed up considerably from the force with which he came to the ground, but was all right last evening."

An illustration from a *Mazeppa* newspaper ad.



The writer called the arenic performance "meritorious and far above the average." Of particular mention were clown Jimmy Reynolds, Zuleila, the female gymnast and "aerial fairy," and the Davenport brothers. He then added, "The management and the company are courteous, honorable and gentlemanly, and we recommend them to the kind consideration of the press and public wherever they may go."<sup>29</sup>

At the end of July, R. E. J. Miles, who had been a co-proprietor, purchased the circus, which continued to function under the DeHaven banner. We can only assume that DeHaven remained as manager. The company traveled the Ohio River until it reached Wheeling, West Virginia, when it was transferred to moving on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

At Wheeling it was reported that the balloon ascension drew a huge crowd. "It is wonderful how many people will turn out to see a show," the *Daily Intelligence* observed, "when it costs nothing." Also noted was that the lady advertised to go up in it "wore a splendid pair of whiskers." Nevertheless, some 2,000 people were on hand to witness the evening performance, which was judged very fair. "We do not hanker, however, after a repetition of the thrilling spectacle of the *Mazeppa*. It's too exciting. Soda water is not more so."

The paper announced that the show was to leave the *Victor* and go by rail before returning to river travel again at some point. September and October were devoted to the southeastern part of the country before entering into competition with other circuses in the deep South. But the *Clipper* indicated in November there were too many of them touring in that territory, no less than nine. There was little demand for cotton at this time and the war in Europe had put a damper on faith in the economy. James M. Nixon's Circus was in Alabama and Mississippi; C. T. Ames' in Georgia; G. G. Grady's in Alabama; Noyes & Van Amburgh's in Tennessee; Stowe's in Mississippi; Cooper, Hemmings & Whitby's in Mississippi; Stone & Murray's in Mississippi; and J. W. Robinson's in Mississippi. Miles, with the



**LAKE'S**  
**Hippo-Olympiad and Mammoth Circus.**



**THE GREATEST AND MOST THOROUGHLY**  
organized, and universally popular Show on the  
Continent, enlarged and re-appointed especially for a  
Southern tour, under the management of the celebra-  
ted Equestrienne,

**Madame AGNES LAKE.**

E. J. Mills.....General Director  
J. M. Wickwire.....Contracting Agent  
Charles C. Pell.....Superintendent

Madame LAKE, in rendering a grateful recognition  
for the manifold and oft-repeated favors she has re-  
ceived at the hands of the Southern people the many  
seasons the

**"HIPPO-OLYMPIAD"**

has exhibited in the South, is pleased to be enabled to  
assure her patrons that she visits them this season  
with a

**Troupe of the Leading Artists of the  
Day.**

GYMNASTS,  
ATHLETES, AND  
EQUESTRIENNES.

EACH ONE A CELEBRITY IN HIS OR HER  
Peculiar Specialty, and forming, in combination, the  
most attractive array of talent ever assembled in

**ONE EXHIBITION,  
AND**

**For One Admission Fee !**

WILL EXHIBIT AT  
**CHARLESTON**

An 1871 newspaper ad for Agnes Lake's Circus. Pfening Archives

former DeHaven outfit, also moved into Mississippi and supposedly went broke at Brandon in November.

At the first of the year R. E. J. Miles joined Agnes Lake's Hippo-Olympiad as general director for a two-month winter season in the South. The circus carried a strong company which included Agnes and Emma Lake, Minnie and Hiram Marks, Charles Lowery, Charles Melville, the Lascelles Brothers, clown John Davenport, etc. Horace Nichols was equestrian director; Levi J. North was master of the circle; J. S. Totten, treasurer. Miles also made quick use of his propensity for a balloon ascension as a free act, for it was announced that at 1 p.m. each day, shortly before the start of the mati-

nee, Prof. J. W. Hayden fired up his equipment and went aloft.

The spectacle of Mazeppa, Wild Horse of Tartary was featured, in which, the ad read, "MME. AGNES will appear in her original role of Mazeppa, supported by the well known Equestrian Actor, R. E. J. MILES, and a full and efficient Dramatic Company." Agnes was, to use a theatrical expression, "up in the piece," having performed it many times from an adaptation for the ring arranged by her husband. In 1865 she went to Germany for a special appearance in Berlin, thus establishing her as a Mazeppa of international reputation.

A January *Clipper* indicated the company had been doing very fair business in New Orleans. This must have been prior to an engagement at Mobile beginning on January 2 for three days. The show then followed a route into Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, then back into Georgia before disbanding for the winter in Atlanta on February 25. After which, the Hippo-Olympiad returned to Cincinnati.

R. E. J. Miles remained as director of Lake's Hippo-Olympiad for the summer season. This final tour under that title covered a vast area. Beginning in Ohio, the show followed with Illinois and Iowa, then by rail to Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, back to Kansas, into Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, closing at Cincinnati, and into winter quarters across the river in Newport, Kentucky.

#### NOTES

1. W. W. Durand, "The Late Andrew Haight, Career of Noted Circus Manager and Agent," *New York Clipper*, February 20, 1886.

2. Durand, *Great Eastern Route Book*, 1872. Durand introduced his obituary of Haight with, "For ten years of his life I was Andrew Haight's friend and associate, and for nearly twenty years we had been personally intimate. Therefore it seems fitting that I should undertake the sad duty of telling something of his life."

3. Clipping from *Billboard*, no date.

4. Robert J. Loeffler, "Visits of George Washington DeHaven and His Circus to St Paul, Minnesota and Beyond," Part 4, p. 26, *White Tops*, November-December, 2002, quoting from the St. Paul (MN) *Pioneer and Democrat*, May 12, 1865.

5. McGregor (IA) *North Iowa Times*, May 24, 1865.

6. Orin C. King, "Only Big Show Coming," Vol. 1, Chapter 1, Part 1, *Bandwagon*, November-December, 1996.

7. *Ibid.*

8. John Glenroy, *Ins and Outs of Circus Life*, p. 141.

9. *Harper's Weekly*, April 14, 1866, quoting the Cincinnati *Enquirer*.

10. St. Paul (MN) *Pioneer*, May 6, 1866.

11. Loeffler, Part 5, p. 26, *White Tops*, January-February, 2003, quoting from the St. Paul (MN) *Pioneer and Democrat*, May 24, 1866.

12. Reprinted in Leavenworth (KS) *Daily Conservative*, June 30, 1866.

13. Leavenworth (KS) *Daily Conservative*, July 1, 1866.

14. Loeffler, Part 5, p. 28, quoting the Missouri *Republican*.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *New York Clipper*, October 20, 1866.

17. St. Paul (MN) *Pioneer*, January 9, 1867.

18. *New York Clipper*, June 8, 1867.

19. Advertisement, Portland (ME), August 21, 1867, lists the following performers: Luke Rivers, William Dutton, Oliver Bell, Lafontaines Brothers, P. H. Seamon, Annie Worland, Thomas O'Brian, E. Schofield, G. W. DeHaven, Madame Worland, Gus Lee, Master Henry, and La Petite Annie.

20. W. Quinette Hendricks, *Stranger Than Fiction*.

21. *New York Clipper*, July 18, 1868.

22. *New York Clipper*, April 24, 1869.

23. Loeffler, Part 7, p. 29, *White Tops*, May-June, 2003, quoting from the St. Paul (MN) *Pioneer and Democrat*, June 12, 1869.

24. *New York Clipper*, September 4, 1869.

25. Cincinnati (OH) *Daily Enquirer*, September 18, 1869.

26. *New York Clipper*, October 10, 1869.

27. Durand, *Great Eastern Route Book*, 1872.

28. The *Victor #4*, under the command of Capt. Uriah B. Scott, was christened in 1866. Its size was 171 x 25.5 x 4.5, 286 tons. Frederick Way, *Way's Packet Directory*, item 5566.

29. Quincy (IL) *Daily Herald*, June 4, 1870.



# The 2006 Circus Historical Society Convention

By Joe Parker

They came from far and wide for the 2006 Circus Historical Society convention. On Thursday afternoon, May 4, over 70 circus historians started gathering at the Sarasota Cay Club. The lobby was crowded as new arrivals greeted old friends, registered for the convention, and planned their weekend in the Florida sun. The conversation and socializing continued at the Tiki Bar with a poolside Happy Hour, overlooking the Hotel Marina and Sarasota Bay.

The official events began Friday; everyone was up bright and early for the morning field trip to the Ringling-Barnum train recycling facility in nearby Palmetto. The group had an all-too-short tour of the facility where the Feld shows—the three circuses and the ice shows—are designed, built, and assembled. Wardrobe, rail facilities, props and all the rest of the supporting equipment and shops are there. Mounting a show is a massive project, and we came away from Palmetto with a better understanding of what goes into each Ringling show we see in our hometown.

We got back on the bus to go to the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, particularly the new Tibbals Leaning Center. We started with the

The group at the Ringling facility in Palmetto. John Gilmore photo.



Howard Tibbals, Ken Harck, Guy Fiorenza and David Carlyon. John Gilmore photo.

exhibits at the "old" circus museum, followed by a sandwich buffet at the Banyan Café.

After lunch, Howard Tibbals, Debbie Walk, and other museum staff explained how the Tibbals Learning Center was planned and built, showing us the process used to install, catalog, and document the Howard Bros. Circus model. We then toured the Tibbals building, and looked in awe at the Howard Bros. Circus: a complete, scale-model, three-ring tented circus loosely based on the Ringling-Barnum Circus of the late 1930s, complete down to the dishes and eating utensils in the cook house tent. It took 14 months to install thousands of scaled railroad ties and spikes; 6,000 individual fold-

ing chairs (in two colors); a big-top full of performers including identifiable figures of Unus, Lou Ja-cobs, and many others. It was too much to grasp in one visit. The day at the Ringling

Museum ended with a social hour with snacks and drinks with Howard and Janice Tibbals and Ringling Museum curators.

On Saturday, the formal sessions began in the conference room of the hotel. Douglas Harmon was the first presenter. He is a collector of mid-19th century advertising art who recently acquired 15 lithographs of the Great London Circus, circa 1875-1880. He showed slides of them, and provided details of the acts portrayed. Most of his posters are the only surviving example of its image. He gave a fascinating insight into early circus advertising from the perspective of an art collector, not a circus collector.

While artists of color have played important parts in the history of the American circus, their participation has not been adequate-



Bob Houston and Junior Ruffin. Ray Gronso photo.

ly documented or acknowledged. Manuel Ruffin (Prince Bogino), Saturday's second presenter, spoke of his life on the circus, and helped remedy that. He joined the circus at age 14 as a cage assistant to the great Clyde Beatty (who gave Ruffin his lifelong nickname of "Junior"), and spent his whole working life on the circus as a performer, backstage hand, canvas boss, trainmaster, and just about every job possible with a traveling circus. He made us laugh with funny stories about his life and the people he worked with on various shows. For example, when he had his big cat act in the 1960s and 1970s, he was billed as "Prince Bogino"



because it was thought that white audiences would accept a black animal trainer if he were an "African Prince with an Italian name," but not if he was an African-American. The billing led to an embarrassing question about "Prince Bogino's" southern accent. Ruffin's wit and humor were equal to the occasion: Prince Bogino explained he acquired the accent while his tribe was in exile in Florida.

An academic triple play on animal training and welfare followed. Nigel Rothfels from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was first up. He presented a paper on how the European and American conception of elephant behavior and temperament has changed over time. Enlightenment-era scholars (never having seen an elephant) projected their ideals of rationality and control into their descriptions of elephant behavior; the Victorians used their obsession with death and sentimentality to create the idea of the weeping, tender-hearted elephant; and today, society anthropomorphizes elephants, and treats them as though they were human.



Presenters Nigel Rothfels, Narisara Murray and Janet Davis. John Gilmore photo.

Narisara Murray then presented from her book-in-progress on the famous Jumbo, telling us about Jumbo's life before he "emigrated" to America, and casting light in some of the remarkable people Jumbo encountered, such as the three Sharif brothers, Arab hunters who probably sold Jumbo as a calf, or Colonel Samuel Baker, an English hunter whose diaries describe the Sharifs' capture and sale of the baby



Presenters Debbie Walk and Ellsworth Brown. Ray Gronso photo.

Jumbo, or Matthew Scott, the drunken keeper who apparently made a rich living selling rides on Jumbo in the London Zoo.

Janet Davis, from the University of Texas at Austin, batted cleanup, presenting her views on the development of the American animal welfare movement. She said that the animal welfare movement grew up as a result of the urban Americans' separation from working animals (in the cities, working animals were increasingly replaced by machines), plus the religious fervor also seen at that time in evangelical Christianity, temperance, and, in an earlier generation, abolitionism. She is developing the idea further, and plans to expand her ideas in a book on this subject. All three papers had clear pertinence to the current animal-rights clamor to remove animals, especially elephants, from circuses and zoos.

After lunch, Terry O'Brien, author of the book *Close but No Cigar-A Street Urchin's Tale*, talked to us about his life in and around circuses, and how events in his life, traveling in circuses as a juggler and wire-walker, inspired the adventures in his novel. O'Brien worked for a "gypsy" circus in Ireland, the National Security Agency, Disney World, and as an advance man for the L. E. Barnes Circus, a rather odd grouping of jobs to say the least.

Ellsworth Brown, Director of the Wisconsin State Historical Society,

reported on the condition of the Circus World Museum. The state historical society owns CWM, and has oversight responsibilities. Brown reported on the CWM's new organizational structure, its current budget and financial condition, and its short-term goals. The bottom line of his report is that Circus World Museum "is alive, if not yet well." He expressed confidence that CWM will remain open, and remain a National Treasure for generations to come.

Debbie Walk, curator of collections for the Ringling Museums, presented a paper on Mable Ringling, the wife of John Ringling and the driving force behind the Ca d'Zan mansion on the museum grounds. We learned of Mable's humble birth and upbringing in Moons (now Buena Vista), Fayette County, Ohio. Walk suspects Mable met John at the Chicago World's Fair, leading to their marriage in December 1903. Eventually Mable became the founding president of the Sarasota Garden Club, and a leading member of Sarasota society.

Tom Dunwoody, Director of the Circus Hall of Fame in Peru, Indiana, spoke of the current status and future plans of that museum, which includes paving the road, reconstructing some of the buildings, a new educational program for Indiana 4th graders, and taking the Hall's circus performers to the Indiana State Fair.

David Carlyon was the final presenter of the day, offering his unique perspective on *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. Carlyon sees *Tom Sawyer* as the idealized recollections of Twain's childhood, while *Huck Finn* reflects his adult disillusionment. The circus sequence in chapter 22 of *Huck Finn* is, however, an idyllic description of the "dream circus." He explained his theory of why that dream circus is in the exact middle of Twain's attack on corrupt society. In addition, he describes how many of the characters and plotlines in *Huck Finn* are paralleled in events and legends associated with Dan Rice.

Saturday night was devoted to the annual auction with lots of circus posters, memorabilia, books, and



most importantly money changing hands. Everyone had a great time and it produced \$3,240 that will be used for *Bandwagon*.

Fred Dahlinger kicked off the Sunday morning session with "1907: The Season that Set the Course of Circus History for the Next Century"—a bold title that he justified in his paper. At the beginning of 1907, there were two big circus companies, Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Brothers. At the end of the year, the Ringlings were in complete control of both shows. Dahlinger's paper explicated the tangle of factors involved: the void left by the death of James A. Bailey, personal antipathy among the leading circus men, and bad management decisions were only some of them. By the end, he had shown us how the Ringlings ended up in control of the American circus business.



John Zweifel and the former Ringling performers. Ray Gronso photo.

Robert Sabia then showed a series of slides of the 1941 through 1943 Ringling-Barnum shows. He suggested that these years, when John Ringling North first exerted full creative control, were a major change from the pre-war years, with new designers and new energy in the shows. He went so far as opining that the 1941 performance "may be the best show ever." The slides certainly showed bright, colorful, and creative costumes and specs, delightful to the eye and refreshing to the spirit.

John Zweifel then presented a panel of former Ringling performers who were involved in making the movie *The Greatest Show on Earth*. The performers, Jackie LeClaire,

Jennie Sleeter, Dorita Estes, Jeanne Krause, Mary Jane Miller, Rosie Alexander, Norma Fox, and Lola Dobritch, explained how some of the acts and stunts were done, and gave their point of view on Cecil B. DeMille and some of the actors involved. It was very enlightening and entertaining to hear their "behind the scenes" take on the film, and on the Ringling show of the early 1950s. As a further celebration of the movie, Dom Yodice presented "Greatest Show on Earth" costume designs, photos, and props, including Dorothy Lamour's "Iron Jaw" mouthpiece. The members were so fascinated with the discussion that it ran long and threatened to continue through lunch.

To kick off the afternoon session Richard Georgian presented the adventures of the "Luella Forepaugh-Fish Wild West Show of 1903," which focused on the troupe of Georgian Cossack riders on the show, and through their perspective, showed how the tour was a disaster because of lack of planning, poor management, and phenomenally bad luck with the weather. The paper was drawn from his forthcoming book on the Georgian Cossacks; *Buffalo Bill's Deceit—the Cossack's Curse*.

Peggy Williams in her paper "Selling the Circus in the 21st Century," demonstrated the ways in which Ringling Bros. marketed itself in the last few years, and explained the new strategy of recent years. The key to competing with all the other available entertainment, she said, is to be part of the audience's lives all year, not just for a few weeks leading up to the circus coming to town. Therefore, they use the Ringling website, the "Circus Fit" health program for kids, "Circus in Education" modules and material for school teachers, computer games and computer learning programs, to keep the



Presenter Peggy Williams. Ed Limbach photo.

Ringling brand in the minds of kids and parents all year long.

John Herriott and Buckles Woodcock presented Sunday's final session. The two lifelong circus performers and animal trainers shared stories, usually humorous, of their friendship and careers in the circus, commented on the present state and future of the circus, explained how animal-training should be done, and where many trainers go wrong. It's clear that both men loved working in the circus with animals. We were privileged to hear them reminisce about their lives.

The grand finale of the convention was the Sunday night banquet. First, Fred D. Pfening, Jr. was recognized with a standing ovation for his forty-five years of dedication to the *Bandwagon*. Then John Wetenhall, Executive Director of the Ringling Museum, spoke about the past and future of his institution. The circus collections, he noted, are important to that future. Cataloging and inventorying the collection, thus making it more accessible for research, is a key part of the plan. Another circus building, aimed at creating an even broader circus-education experience for visitors, is in the works as well. It is truly good news that circus is a prominent part of the future of the Ringling Museum and Sarasota.

With that, the 2006 Sarasota convention came to a close, and President Bob Sabia and wife Susan could relax. Their work was well done, and the show was a hit! I'm confident they'll relax a few days before resuming their efforts to make next year's event as entertaining and informative as this year's.



# Bill Woodcock's Circus Album

This is what you call stage presence. This picture of Tom Mix was taken at the Peru winter quarters of the Sells Floto Circus, in the spring of 1931, the last of his three years with the show.

Hubert Castle told me that early in his career he was with the Tom Mix Circus and found Mix to be one of the most colorful people he ever knew. He said the show always traveled early in the morning in a caravan style and you could always tell when Mix had been drinking because he would be on hand to help roust everybody up in the morning and with considerable fanfare mount his current automobile and lead the show off the lot. In something like a cavalry charge, he would thunder off in the direction of the next town and you wouldn't see him again until show time.

Castle said that one time Mix was driving a convertible and after the usual hurrah he was off and away. En route there was a fork in the

highway with a shallow lake situated in the center. As the show came chugging along each party was stunned to see that Mix had missed the turn and had driven his car out into the center of the lake. Now submerged up to the windshield, he remained seated and still holding the steering wheel, but with the same look of authority from beneath his wilted cowboy hat.

I was only twelve, but I was a big kid and could do a day's work when my family and I were on the Cole Bros. Circus in 1947. My job was to set up the number two concession stand in the menagerie. I worked for a guy named Herbert Farrington who we always called Iowa. I set up the stand in the morning



while he took the ice delivery truck around the lot for drop-offs. At night after the menagerie was down I made the blow off for Frances O'Connell, called Zoot Suit or Zooty, who had a garbage joint out front.

The most boring thing I had to do was watch Iowa's menagerie stand during the performance so nothing got boosted while he worked the seats. With the proper layout, I could wander up to the connection and watch part of the performance as well as keep an eye on the stand.

My favorite acts by far were the Cristiani riding act and Hubert Castle's wire act. Castle's real name was Hal Smith and he learned to walk wire in his back yard. I think his first show was Seils-Sterling where he used the name Hal Silvers. Later John Ringling North gave him the Hubert Castle moniker.



His closing trick was a backward somersault through a hoop, feet to feet, and like a baseball player in a slump he would go through periods where he would blow the trick. He had a notorious temper and on one occasion I saw him miss the trick, miss it again and then throw the hoop into the seats. Another time, which I didn't see, he jumped down and whacked a candy butcher for moving around while he did the somersault. From that point on, Mrs. Terrell, the owner's wife, would stand between the grandstand and the front end blues when he worked to make sure it didn't happen again.

I don't think many people remember that Castle was with Ringling-Barnum when the Greatest Show on Earth movie was made but his act was excluded from it because he insisted on being paid Screen Actors' Guild wages since he was a member. He worked between Lola Dobritch and Tonito's slack wire. Here's a picture of him on Cole in 1947.

This is Bert Nelson and Maria Rasputin in Peru prior to the 1935 season. They had been brought to the Hagenbeck Wallace-Forepaugh Sells show to replace Clyde Beatty who



had gone on to bigger and better things with Cole Bros. I have no idea what Mlle. Rasputin's background was; however, I'm sure that being the daughter of Czarist Russia's Mad Monk was all she needed.

I met Bert Nelson in 1972. He just happened to visit the Miller-Johnson Circus, where we were working, in San Bernardino, California, the day we learned that Cliff Vargas had purchased the show. Parley Baer introduced me to Mr. Nelson, and I in turn introduced them both to Vargas. After the show that night we all went out to eat and I took an immediate liking to Nelson. He visited a few more times while we were in the

area. I wish I could have gotten to know him better.

And last but certainly not least we have the dazzling Barbara Woodcock, my wife. She always accused me to telling the truth about her age and lying about Anna May's. This is my favorite picture of them, staged in New York by the Ringling press department for *Us* magazine in the late 1970s.

That year we showed Madison Square Garden for twelve weeks, almost three months. It seated 17,000 for the circus, three shows Saturday, two shows Sunday, all generally sold out.

We got the crash course in being socialites. Fred Nathans got us comps to the Broadway shows. Bobby Johnson took us to the Rainbow Room at Rockefeller Center. Eartha Kitt took us to Studio 54 which I was surprised to find was the same old barn in which we had done the Ed Sullivan Show years before.

The most unique event, however, was a benefit showing of Ira Levin's *Death Trap* one night about midnight and attended by cast members of all the other Broadway shows such as *Chorus Line*. On the 20th Century, Timbuktu, and so on. In fact, a bunch of people from Annie were seated in front of us, still in wardrobe. They must have come directly from the stage.

The whole affair was similar to the Show Folks Circus in Sarasota. Everyone knew everyone else and I think there were even a few inside jokes added to the play since the audience roared at a few lines that didn't make any sense to me.

Anyway, my point is that I was surprised how many of the theater people approached us that evening having seen the Ringling show in the Garden, and expressed total awe over the production numbers, wardrobe and talent. There was no doubt in my mind it was the biggest thing in town.

I might add that on the march back to the cars after three months inside, the elephants were a hand full, pretty frisky. The Africans didn't want to load.





# Side Lights On The Circus Business

## PART FORTY FIVE By David W. Watt

*Editor's note. The dates listed are the dates the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Daily Gazette.*

**April 19, 1919**

A few days ago I received a letter from an old friend in New York, giving me a detailed account of the wonderful acts and performers of the greatest show that the world has ever seen, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey combined, which is now showing at Madison Square Garden, New York.

Among other attractions he said: "Dave, there is one there that you know well, and he is said to be 86 years of age, and this is none other than Zip, the dog-faced man, or "Barnum's What Is It."

Zip dates back to the early 60's when P. T. Barnum featured Tom Thumb, Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren. These people were drawn in a shell-shaped carriage drawn by eight small ponies.

Back in '83 when Jason Robbins of Brooklyn, New York had the privileges with the Burr Robbins show, Zip was the big feature of the sideshow during the summer. It was almost every day that Zip brought extra people enough into the side show to pay his salary for one week. Without a question, he is the oldest freak on exhibition with the show at the present.

The writer said that Zip held his age wonderfully and could see but little change in him in the last 30 years.

It was along about the middle of the 80's that the two Forepaughs, Senior and Junior, and myself were having a visit in the big wagon while waiting for the rain to subside, that Adam Forepaugh, Jr. told me many

interesting stories of his travels the winter before and about the different European countries while searching for performers for the coming year.

After the young man had finished a long and interesting description of his travels, he said to me: "Dave, I think the rain has let up a little and I will continue this story at some other time."

It was then that his father spoke up and said. "Addie you have forgotten to tell one in particular that

Adam Forepaugh, Jr. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



would interest Dave and that is about the big diamond that you bought in London. You know you paid \$13,000 of my good money for that diamond."

It was 43 karats and was the largest single stone that I had ever seen. The elder Forepaugh remarked that if the dealer was not fortunate enough to run across as big a sucker as his son, it probably would still be in his possession. The young man simply said, "You are quite lucky to have one man like me around the show that can make a flush of that kind, and it is a good advertisement, for people that see it will talk about it for years to come."

But it took the father a long time to get over the shock when the young man told him of the amount of money that it cost. Whether after his death a few weeks ago, he willed it to someone or left it to be sold with other belongings, that I know nothing about. This was one of the young man's fads to have something different from anyone else and something that would keep the public talking about the great animal trainer. When he stepped into the ring to where the elephants and the trained broncos were, there seemed to be as many people watching the big diamond as were watching the show.

I had not been with the show long before I found out that there was but one candy kid around the show and that was Adam, junior. If he was on your staff, you could stay there indefinitely, and if he was not, your days were numbered. Adam, Senior, many times in the big wagon, would tell me what a spendthrift his boy was and how much it cost him, but I was too wise to side in with him and would always tell him that the kind of work his boy did, money would not buy and that he only had one son. After telling him something of my idea of the value the boy was to the show, the old man would look over his glasses and say, "Dave, I guess you are right. If the whole dressing room would walk out, my Addie, the elephants and the band could give the show."

The only way to get along was to let the old man find the fault and to stand up for the kid and to attend well to your work and your stay was indefinite.



In his day I never knew a man or woman connected with the show, be they foreigners or Americans, that would not declare that they would rather travel with the Adam Forepaugh show than any other show in the business.

The European performers were always anxious to make a contract for the next season and many times Adam Forepaugh would get them positions in the different theaters in Philadelphia and New York during the winter.

The Forepaugh Theater on Eighth Street in Philadelphia would always open August 20th and run until the middle of June, and the different ones around the show would always find employment there.

The Siegrist & Silbon aerial act which has been one of the big features with the Ringling and Barnum & Bailey shows for years was brought over to this country from England in '84. While there are but two of the original troupe of seven, the act has been kept up all these years and is one of the best feature acts today in the business.

Toto Siegrist and Eddie Silbon are the owners and the other five are working on a salary. In the *New York Times* a week ago the Siegrist and Silbon troupe came in for as much praise as any act in the show. Toto Siegrist, the man that springs the double somersaults from one side of the canvas to the other, will be 59 years of age next birthday.

This I think should go to help prove the story of the farmer weighing the calf.

#### April 26, 1919

It was in '86 that the Adam Forepaugh show late in October closed the season at Norristown, Pennsylvania. This was only about forty miles from Philadelphia and the limited train left Philadelphia for Chicago about 10:40 and arrived in Norristown a little before 12:00. I had already made arrangements for the arrival of this train, and as I had all the people to pay off there, I made arrangements with the performers and sideshow people to pay them in the afternoon. Most of the working people such as canvasmen and drivers went to the winter quarters

where the bookkeeper was to pay them off later.

For some weeks before the closing of the show, the bookkeeper and I were not the best of friends. Any time when he could hold me off or bother me in any way, he was more than ready to do so.

The late Adam Forepaugh Jr. for some time had owed me \$75 and in settlement that night, I put a due bill into the bookkeeper for the \$75 and put the money in my pocket. When he saw the due bill, he threw it back into my end of the wagon and said: "There is something that I don't want." I immediately threw it back to him and said, "You want it as bad as I do, and I have the money for it and I am going to keep it." He immediately jumped out of the wagon and rushed over to the show and told Mr. Forepaugh, Sr., that I had put the bill in for \$75 against the son, and he knew nothing about it and that I would not give the money up.



During the season, as was Mr. Forepaugh's practice, he had picked up many fine carriage horses and single drivers and advertised some two or three weeks ahead in Philadelphia and New York papers that he had something like forty head of fine carriage team and single drivers which he would put on sale at Norristown on the closing day. There were many purchasers from both Philadelphia and New York and Mr. Forepaugh sold something like \$16,000 worth of horses that day. This work, coupled with the work of the closing of the show made it a busy day for the boss.

When the bookkeeper told him about the \$75, he came back to the wagon and asked me about it and if his son owed me that amount. I told him that no one around the show owed me anything as I needed what money was coming to me for the com-

ing winter. "Well," said he, "do you expect to do business that way and come back here next season?" I was not long in telling him that the next season did not bother me, as I was the kind that lived every day and that I had so much trouble in settling for the present season, that next season never entered my mind.

"Well, this has been a busy day for me, and between you and me, Dave, this meddlesome bookkeeper will not be here next year to annoy you. You had better come on a few weeks ahead of the opening of the show and help me to fit out the show as you have been in the habit of doing. By the time you have been home a few days, you will forget all the unpleasantness of this season and you can look forward to next year being a pleasant one. There will be no one in the ticket wagon to annoy you." This meant that I had to keep the books myself, in addition to the work which I had always had to do, but that I did

not mind, for there was but little bookkeeping to do, for all there was to enter was the amount you paid out on one sheet and the day's receipts on the other. Adam Forepaugh often said that the difference would be the difference whether it was profit or loss.

As Adam Forepaugh never had a partner and everything taken in around the show went to the one man, it was an easy matter to keep the books.

From that time on, I was the sole proprietor in the ticket wagon, and while the work was early and late and something doing all of the time, I got around the ticket wagon to suit myself. The extra work was a little hard in the start, but it was not long before I found it much easier than with a partner in the wagon who was hard to please. If a man was always at his post attending strictly to business, there never was a nicer man to work for than Adam Forepaugh, no one who was easier to please—for he never cared where you were or what you were doing as long as your work was up to date. He was different from many managers and he was always right from start to finish.

After Forepaugh's death and the



passing of the show into the hands of the Barnum people, although I was never treated better than I was by the new owners, there was a different atmosphere around the show and it never seemed as much like home as it did when Adam Forepaugh was the only man to please. In the new firm there were two proprietors and a new manager. After I thoroughly knew the work, I never was used better than by the new man, but it never seemed to be like the old show. This was the case in many instances around the show, both in the dressing room among the performers and the working men as well. Several new bosses were put in the different departments and their orders were a little different from those the men had been working for in the old show. There would scarcely be a payday when some one of the old-timers that had been there for years would say: "Dave, this is different from the old show." It did not seem the same to them. It was two or three years later that but few of the old faces could be seen around the show. I sometimes think that the once famous Adam Forepaugh show is a thing of the past, only to be known in history or it seems to me like a dream. While in the business, we all had our troubles; there was a brighter side to it for the reason that many of them never happened.

Today five of the greatest shows the world has ever seen are all boiled down in one Ringling and Barnum & Bailey combined in Madison Square Garden, New York. What Janesville's prospect in getting the show this summer is, that I am unable to tell you, but the big shows are headed this way.

On Decoration Day the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey combined and Hagenbeck-Wallace will show side by side in Cleveland, Ohio. But there is one thing certain and that is that they will have to make longer runs than has been their practice heretofore.

The following letter from Cleveland tells of the two great shows: "For the first time in the history of Cleveland, two first rank circuses will be in town to start the season. On Decoration Day the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey shows and the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus

UMSLA, NEWARK, N.J.  
20th and Paul,  
One Day Only,  
MONDAY 1919.

# CIRCUS

## HAGENBECK-WALLACE CIRCUS

THE WONDER SHOW  
THE LIKE OF WHICH YOU NEVER SAW BEFORE

All New Again! All Right Again!

A CIRCUS GATHERED FROM 18 NATIONS  
USED FOR 123 YEARS  
CAPITAL INVESTED \$3,000,000

6 ARENAS 80 RIDERS—60  
RAILROAD TRAINS—3 80 AERIALISTS—60  
8 TENTS—22 50 CLOWNS—50  
8 BANDS—4 100 ACTS—100  
400 PERFORMERS

YOU HAVE NEVER WITNESSED A CIRCUS LIKE THIS

Two performances daily, 2 and 8 p. m. Doors open one hour earlier. One ticket admits to everything. Children under 10 years half price. Gala, Golden, Million-Dollar Street Parade 10 a. m., preceding first performance.

### HAGENBECK'S ZOOLOGICAL PARADISE

Including World's Greatest Collection of Trained Beasts

Performing in a massive Steel-Grated Arena. The Wild World of August and Complete what is now the BIGGEST ZOO-EARTH

THE GREAT WALLACE CIRCUS DE LUXE 50 CLOWNS 50 INCLUDING PHO THE KING JESTER

Newspaper ad used by Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1919.

will present performances simultaneously, the one on the newly apporportioned lake front property belonging to the city, and the other adjacent to Luna Park. Amusement enterprise interests are keen for the contest, for it is believed some old-time "stuff may be pulled."

As for myself, I have been having a set-to with Father Time and like many other games, I lost out and on Thursday last, April 24, he pushed me by my 70th mile-stone without

Bert Cole.



apology, and the first thing that I know, he will order my side lights out, and but few will care but us.

May 3, 1919

A letter printed in last week's *Billboard* concerning the whereabouts of Bert Cole is of more than ordinary interest to me, as Bert was my guest for two weeks in '83 with the Burr Robbins show when we went overland by wagon.

It happened in this way. His father, George S. Cole, made all the concert announcements and announced the acts in the big show. Bert Cole's mother died when he was a small child and he lived with his grandparents at Potsdam, New York. When his school closed the last of June, although he was only eight years of age, he made a strong plea to come on and visit his father for two weeks which he did. As I had a better horse and top carriage, he came with me. He told me many times that when he grew up to be a man he was going to do exactly what his father was doing--making concert announcements and announcing feature acts in the big show. I have only met Bert one since that time and that was several years ago when Hagenbeck-Wallace visited Janesville.

The following letter tells of the success that Bert Cole has met with in the business.

"Bert Cole, who played at the Majestic last week with his act, 'Billy Burke's Tango Shoes' left the act at the close of the week in order to report at West Baden, where he will resume his duties as announcer with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show. This will make the nineteenth consecutive season that Mr. Cole has held that position.

"The Billy Burke Shoes made its usual hit in Chicago, and the critics all spoke highly of the act. Bert says: 'To use my father's expression, "It was very pleasing to open in New York in October and close in Chicago in April."'

New York has gone circus wild. Never in the history of the circus business has there been such a demand for seats as there is this season. The super circus is turning them away at every performance. On account of the tremendous business



the management of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show is obliged to give several extra performances in the morning.

Sunday, April 13, a free matinee was given the soldiers and sailors of that city. Everyone connected with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey show donated his or her services gladly, and it did their hearts good to see the crippled soldiers, as well as the sound ones, enjoy the show. The Knights of Columbus were kind to all, passing out good things to eat while the performance was on. Poodles Hanneford was a hit at the Sunday performance. The little comedy bareback rider took the house by storm.

It is estimated that an average of about 2,000 people are being turned away at each performance. Great credit must be given to the press agent of the combined show. Such publicity has never been accorded the show henceforth. May Wirth has never received such publicity. Lew Graham makes the announcements from the end ring of the Garden, a new idea from announcing at the center ring. In doing this Mr. Graham faces the entire audience with his powerful [six?] cylinder voice.

The following is in reference to Earl Shipley, who is supposed to be on his way home. He belonged to the family of circus folks for more than a generation back and has visited Janesville with the different big shows for several years.

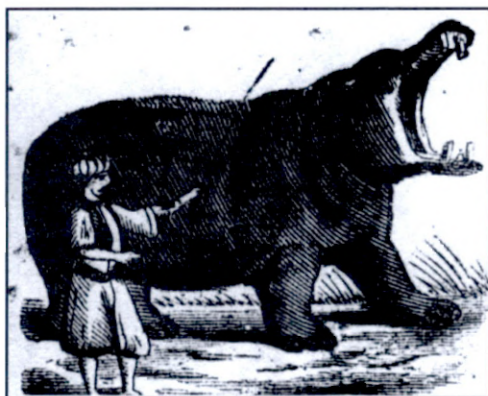
"Earl Shipley writes from Coblenz, Germany under date of March [?] that he is leaving for Marseilles, France and expects to sail for the United States early in April. After a short visit at his home in Willow Springs, Missouri he will again go out with 'Somebody's Clown Alley.' Earl was one of the first 'joys' to cross the big pond under Uncle Sam's colors and saw 16 months of service. He sends best regards to all his friends."

H. Swanson joined the advance force of the Col. George W. Hall show at Evansville, April 17, while other late additions include Fred Lober and M. W. Jehur. General Agent Clarence Auskins reports that the outlook in northern Wisconsin where the show will tour is very favorable.

He further states that this will be the last show to close next fall and the first to start out next spring in the sunny south. The Col. George W. Hall show is a railroad outfit and will travel in two of the best steel cars in the business.

This is what appeared "Gone and soon forgotten." The trial was held on April 17 for the murder of more than half a hundred people at Hammond, Indiana last year. The following is an account of the trial:

"The jury in the trial of Alonzo Sargent, engineer of the troop train that wrecked the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus train at Hammond, Indiana last June, disagreed yesterday, after being out several hours. It is reported that the jury stood seven for conviction and five for acquittal. The trial lasted only two days and is said to have established a record for speed. Alex Todd was the only member of the show who attended the



trial and he was not called to the witness stand. Just what effect this action will have on the many damage suits now pending is not known, but it is felt that it will have an adverse one."

#### May 10, 1919

As most of the circuses under canvas open their tented season anywhere from April 24 to May 1, this has been certainly one of the worst seasons so far that they have seen in many years.

In 1883 the Burr Robbins show opened in Janesville early in May on the lot which is now occupied by the Schaller and McKey Lumber Company. It rained both afternoon and evening.

They went from Janesville to Delavan, Geneva, Burlington and

then started for the northern part of the state. During the entire month of May that year, they only had four days of sunshine. On May 7, the advance agents were George K. Steel, Moundsville, West Virginia and Paul Colvin of the Colvin Baking Company of this city. On that day they drove from Chilton to Neenah and it snowed all day long. As this was a drive of something over 30 miles, it was anything but a pleasant day for the advance wagons of the circus.

Several times we only got up about half the seats in the show as the ground was so soft that the seats could not be erected with safety, and at least half a dozen would have to stand. Yet, despite all the bad weather we had, we had a big house and especially in the afternoon, for the farmers would not go into the fields to work.

After an all night trip through mud and rain, it was late in the afternoon when we arrived at DeKalb, Illinois. The people and horses were all tired out. I made an announcement that it would be impossible to give but one show and that we would be open about five o'clock. The town was crowded with people, and although the show had visited in DeKalb two or three times before in different years, the one house was crowded down to the ring bank. When the tickets were counted up, we found that the show had taken more money at the one performance than we ever did at two shows.

But if any of the smaller shows this year have started out with a light bank account to draw on, it is safe to say that many a one will have to go to the wall if the weather conditions are anything like they were in '83, and they have certainly made a good start in that direction.

The show closed the season that fall with a good balance on the right side of the ledger and went into winter quarters of the fair grounds in Paw Paw, Michigan.

Take this season of '83. It was one of the hardest years that I ever put in the business as I had to be the first one on the lot in the morning and the last one off at night. The year before I had been with the Adam Forepaugh



show where I had a large stateroom all to myself in sunshine or rain. It made but little difference for all that I had to worry, just so I sold all the tickets and paid the bills. After the tickets were counted for the evening performance, I would go to my stateroom where I had all the comforts of home.

Although I finished the season of '83 with the wagon show, it was early in that season that I signed a contract with Adam Forepaugh. At the time he told me I could stay there as long as he ran the show. I remained there until his death and two years after it passed into the hands of Cooper & Bailey.

But after the closing of the season in '83, I never wanted to see another wagon show or to be connected with it in any way as long as I lived. For to work all day and travel all night through the mud and rain when a dozen times or more during the night I would have to wake up performers and have them help us over the road was hard work.

On one of these trips I paid out \$84 one night to performers to help us into the next town when many a horse had given out and laid down by the roadside.

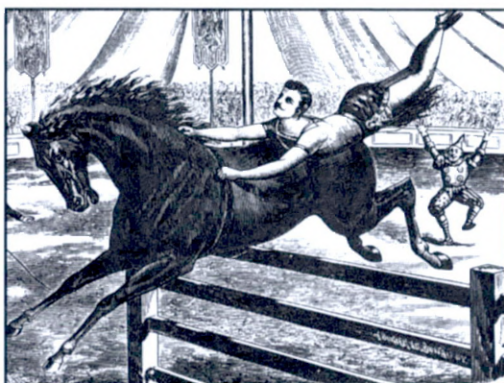
The next season when I was with Adam Forepaugh when I related the hardships that I went through with the wagon show the season before, he simply smiled and said: "Dave, I have been through it all in the early days, and it is certainly a real brave man who will go through such a season of hardships and come out smiling next spring ready to start out again, but I am like you, no more wagon show business for me, for the work in every department around the circus is not only hard, but long hours, and when you are done, you are certainly obliged to have a little time that you can enjoy.

"Yet when my show was a wagon show, I certainly enjoyed getting up early in the morning and driving 15 or 20 miles as the case might be to the next town. Several seasons we would open about the middle of April in Philadelphia and several times went as far west as Kansas and Nebraska where we would swing around and start back for the east and many times would not show up until late in October. If we struck

good weather in September and October to me those were two of the most enjoyable months of the season. On one of these long trips I recollect well the show that we cleared up a little over \$250,000 which, up to that time, had been my banner season in the business."

Adam Forepaugh had a wonderful memory and while visiting with me one evening in the ticket wagon he said: "Dave, in 1874 we showed in Beloit, Janesville and Brodhead and Monroe and from there went to Fort Atkinson and in all of these towns we had a wonderful business."

As a rule, Mr. Forepaugh was a poor visitor with the average person, but occasionally would recollect his



show and business for years back which was certainly interesting to me at the time.

I never knew two such characters as he and his son, Adam, Jr., for the father was always looking after the finances to the last penny, and while the young man was a hard worker, I never gave but little to him and the father always said that he could get more for a postage stamp than that boy could with a \$20 bill. Yet the father was the only one around the show that ever dared to say a word about the son or his faults in any way, if he expected to stay there in the business.

One day the young man came out of the ticket wagon and said: "Boss, I want some money," and when I asked him how much, he said \$500. I handed him a roll of \$500 and he smiled and thanked me for it and ran away. It was some three or four days later that his father heard of it and asked me if I gave his boy \$500. When I told him I did, he said: "Dave, how long do you expect to stay here if you keep

handing that boy all my money in that way?" I said: "I expect to stay here as long as the money lasts."

He immediately said: "Has it got to where I can't handle my help and get them to do as I say?"

I said to him, "Governor, handle your own son and you won't have to handle the help. You know as well as I do that when he is after money, he must have it."

"Yes," said he, "he is the worst boy to get rid of when he wants money that I ever saw."

Then I told him that I thought he was worth it, even though he spent more money than was necessary. His kind around the show was worth all kinds of money. From that time on the young man drew money in any amount and nothing was said. While both he and the son had their peculiarities, they were certainly good to me. If it had been possible for them to have lived until today, even if I was not able to sell the tickets and do the work, I would still be on their payroll.

#### May 17, 1919

A few days ago I received word of the death of an old friend, one with whom I had done much business in my time with the Adam Forepaugh show. The man's name was Imre Kiralfy and he was known the world over as the greatest producer of spectacular shows the world has ever seen. For several years he leased elephants and camels from Adam Forepaugh for his different productions which were shipped to all parts of the country. It was in 1887 that they put on "The Fall of Babylon" on Staten Island. In the open air they built seats to accommodate 50,000 people. On the opening night they sold over 2,000 standing room tickets.

At the opening performance Saturday evening Adam Forepaugh, his wife and I were guests of Mr. and Mrs. Kiralfy. Our show was located about six miles from where they were stationed. Our show opened the following Monday for what we expected to be an unlimited run, possibly closing there late in the season. But Adam Forepaugh did not take long to find out that it was too far from New York City for the show to prove a suc-



cess and the advance men were immediately started out to make contracts for the one-day stands.

The following letter from the *Billboard* gives an account of the achievements of Mr. Kiralfy and of his career in the business. It was 49 years ago that Mr. Kiralfy sent what was then his greatest production, "The Black Crook," with a company of 50 people to Janesville where they filled a successful engagement of two weeks in Lappin's Hall. A year ago last fall Imre Kiralfy's son came on from New York to Chicago to attend the Showmen's League banquet held at the Congress Hotel. Shortly after his arrival, he told the secretary of the Showmen's League that the last thing his father had asked of him was to be sure and find out if Dave Watt, his old friend (who for so many years was the ticket agent and treasurer with the Forepaugh show) was still alive.

I was standing within ten feet of him when he inquired for me and the secretary pointed me out and said to young Kiralfy, "There he is, looking almost as good as new." The young man shook hands with me and said: "Mr. Watt, father has often talked to me about you and told me many interesting stories of the visits he had with you and the different items when he visited the show."

"Imre Kiralfy, who was the famous producer of pageants and spectacular plays, died April 27 at Brighton, England. Kiralfy was born in Budapest in 1845 and made his first appearance as an actor at the age of four years. In his boyhood days he danced in the principal theaters in Germany, meantime studying music. When 22 years old he began organizing pageants and processions. In Brussels in 1868 Kiralfy organized a colossal fete which included operas, pantomimes and sports and a spectacle in which 4,000 soldiers were employed.

"He came to the United States in 1869, remaining in this country 25 years, presenting spectacles. His great spectacle, 'Life of Columbus,' ran for nearly two years at the time of the Chicago Fair, and his



The program cover of the Fall of Babylon in Boston under Barnum and Bailey auspices.

'America, or Three Hundred Years of American History,' at the Auditorium, Chicago, was one of the biggest money makers of the exposition. The show is said to have netted \$1,000,000 in seven and a half months. Other productions put on in the United States included 'The Fall of Babylon' and 'Nero and the Burning of Rome.'

"Kiralfy is probably best remembered in New York for his spectacular

A poster for Imre Kiralfy's The Black Crook.



production, 'The Black Crook,' at the old Niblo Garden. Returning to England, Kiralfy managed many notable entertainments, including a permanent exhibition at Shepherd's Bush, London, and proceeded to show what could be done with machinery, water and electricity. The huge building was turned into a miniature Venice."

The following letter from the advance agent telling of his duties might be interesting to the reader, for in every way it is true to the letter:

"I am the general agent of the circus.

On me depends largely the prolongation of its life.

For 'tis I who arrange the itinerary that the show will visit.

The right cities and towns At the opportune time of the season,

To the end that the seats may always be filled with patrons,

The coffers of the management with money.

Also, I engage the advance agents from bill posters to contractors,

Hiring only the most competent.

Likewise I purchase the posters,

The red and blue and yellow posters,

And look after the advance in general.

Not only do I know from A to Z the circus business,

But I also have a complete working knowledge

Of the United States and Canada.

I know both countries as completely as in Childhood

I knew the map of the country in York state In which I was born and reared.

Mention a village or city. All right, I know that village or city;

I know its industries, the country contiguous to it;

I know the line or lines of railroad.

Therefore you will appreciate why the circus management

Keeps me on the payroll all through the year."

So far as heard from the shows all over the



country (although the first week or ten days the weather was bad) are doing a phenomenal business.

All records for one day's receipts for a 15-car circus were shattered by the Gentry Bros. show at Pensacola, Florida April 29, according to J. B. Austin who was a welcome visitor at the *Billboard* office, Cincinnati, last Wednesday.

Four complete performances were given on that day, two in the afternoon and two at night. Shortly after the noon hour the people swarmed to the show grounds by the hundreds and when it was noticed there would be an immense turn away the management decided to give two matinees. The first was started at 1:45 and those who could not gain admittance to the big top were placed in the menagerie tent and entertained there by the minstrel troupe and other attractions from the sideshow until the second matinee began.

Seeing that there would be a big turn away at night, the management repeated the same stunt, starting the first evening show at 7:45. The first afternoon matinee was capacity; the second a well-filled house. The first night show capacity; the second a tournament in spite of the extra performances. The side show was jammed with people nearly all the afternoon and night.

The colossal circus started its road tour last week in Brooklyn. The big top and its surroundings are beautiful to look at. Boss Superintendent Jim Whalen is certainly a proud

man. It is with pride that he points to the first super circus canvas. The big top is eight poles with five fifties and two thirties. An enlarged menagerie calls for a larger tent and Lew Graham's side show tent and banner display are deserving of special attention. Two more seal troupes joined the show in Brooklyn under the direction of Huling Bros. who now control four big seal acts.

A big applause hit of the show is little May Wirth. She brings down the house at each performance. The always hustling, 24-hour man, Conway, never lets up. If there is an article in New York that Conway does not know of, you've got to show him. The morning performances in the Garden, held by the Knights of Columbus for the visiting "gobs," have been a huge success. The boys make a wonderful audience.

Special mention must be made of Merle Evans and his band. It is, without a doubt, one of the finest combinations of musicians that the Ringlings have ever had. The two grand old "young" men, Jim Whalen and Tom Lynch, are wearing smiles that will not come off. What's the reason? 'Nuff said. Father George Hartzell is the happiest man around the show. Son returned from France and gave father and mother a surprise visit. By the way, Hartzell, Sr., has introduced a new clown gag in the shape of a walk around as the likeness of William Jennings Bryan, carrying a sign, "Me for Grapejuice." Well done, George, but what effect that will have on July 1 nobody knows.

Mention of the Camouflage Troupe of Clowns should be made in the "Page of Magic."

Who said magic was dead?

#### May 24, 1919

A few days ago I received a letter from an old friend, one who had been close to me in the business as anyone and was there all during my time with

the Adam Forepaugh show.

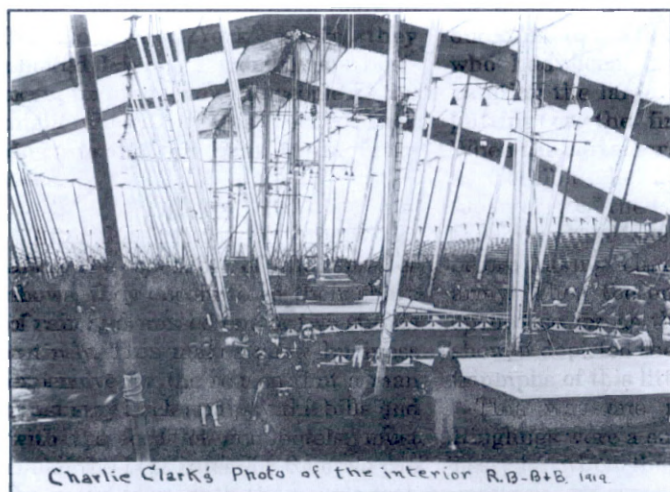
In 1882 which was my first year with that show, we showed two days in Saratoga Springs, New York. This was the first city that was so different from any other that we had ever visited that it appealed to both of us. Many times we would talk over Saratoga Springs and the wonderful sights and the good times that we had. He told me that if he ever went out of the show business that he would surely go to Saratoga Springs and enter into some kind of business. For of all the cities that we showed in, the possibilities there for a small business were certainly good.

After the death of Adam Forepaugh and the show passed into other hands, I remained there for a couple of years. My old friend did not show up the coming year; nor did I hear a word from him until last week when someone, possibly in the business, got hold of a *Janesville Daily Gazette*, the one in which I wrote up the death of Adam Forepaugh, Jr. and his achievements in the business and sent it to Saratoga Springs to my old friend.

He immediately wrote me a letter telling me of his good fortune. He stated that he located in Saratoga Springs in 1891 starting a small delicatessen store which proved to be a success from the start.

He said: "Dave, you know the hours that we spent at different times talking over the possibilities in Saratoga Springs. Well do I remember you being the dinner guest of Judge Hilton, who had one of the most wonderful hotels in this country at that time which was left to him by millionaire A. T. Stewart, New York City.

After the death of Mr. Forepaugh who had been so nice to me for years, I could not make myself believe that I cared to go with any other show and finally a year later, I settled here. From the start my business has grown and I have been able to put by a little money--although for the past five or six years the Springs have not been what they once were. Back in the '80's you know, the town seemed to be the veritable Monte Carlo. It was there they gave 90 day's lease and the great stable owners from all over Europe were out there to compete for the thousands of dollars in



Charlie Clark's Photo of the interior R.B.-B+B, 1919



purses there annually.

"There was gambling of all kinds and everything was wide open. Fair wheels of fortune and all kinds of gambling devices were open until the great crowds that gathered there seemed to live all night and sleep all day. Many thousands of people who were interested in the running of horses sojourned there. But whether Saratoga Springs will ever be made a great racing center again, time will tell."

The different foreign countries represented there during the season seemed to have a little settlement of their own, but the circus seemed to appeal to most of them at least--for the two days' stay was among the best days in the season. The first big show to exhibit on the Pritchard lot was the Ringling Bros.--May 15, 1897. Ed M. Burk, past several seasons in the carnival game in California, was the agent ahead that secured the lot. The show had 65 cars. The big top was a 170 with three 50 feet and two 40-feet middle pieces.

Ike Pritchard is one lot owner in a thousand, he being able to tell off handed as to exact dates, sizes of tops, agent's name, manager's name, kind of weather and business that day and a thousand and one things that the ordinary lot man couldn't tell and doesn't care to know, the rent being about all that most of them look after. Pritchard can tell the 24-hour man just how his top can be best located.

Opposition newspaper ads used by Sells-Floto and Ringling-Barnum in Detroit in 1919.

The biggest top to set on the Pritchard lot was the Barnum & Bailey spread--



Strobridge printed this Joan of Arc lithograph.

200 feet round top with five 50 and two 30-feet middle pieces.

Ike Pritchard recalls many of the older circus agents: S. H. Barrett of the Sells Bros., Tom Howard of the Sells & Renfrew, etc.

Ike has friends and acquaintances in all branches of the circus business, many of them "higher up" ones dropping him personal cards and letters occasionally, some of them being inquiries as to the wheat outlook in western Kansas.

Regarding blowdowns on his lot, Pritchard recalls the fact that the Sells Brothers, this being several seasons after their first visit, met with a big windstorm and lost the day. Pritchard takes pleasure in

relating his many experiences with various shows, agents and bosses. He tells you when Jimmy Robinson first made the people of western Kansas sit up and take notice of his riding.

He also recalls Robert Stickney and the days he was before the eyes of the circus goers. He tells of his first circus meal, it being a dinner with Lew Sells. He mentions incidents in connection with the Doris & Colvin show in 1884 and with the W. W. Cole show in 1886.

Pritchard stated that

the circus doesn't stay long enough for him, that he would like to have it stay for several days, and in this respect, he seemed to be well pleased with a week's stay of the S. W. Brundage shows, a carnival which camped with Ike during the week of May 17, 1915 and of which outfit he spoke very highly, it being the first carnival show to play his lot. The carnival, so Pritchard

explained, advertised the lot as Pritchard's Pleasure Park, this getting the property before the eyes of certain individuals who, a short time ago, attempted to have the city condemn the circus lot and use it as a recreation park. This scheme falling through, however, Pritchard fighting them and still holds the ranch for circus and carnival use.

The Pritchard ranch is located on the north bank of the Arkansas River, Ike holding the position of Special River Observer for many years, it being part of his duty to report every morning by wire to district headquarters at Wichita, advising as to the readings of the river gauges, they being set close to the Pritchard residence.

If you have occasion to make Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, and you want to find out about the circus lot, ask the first native you come to as to the location of Ike Pritchard's ranch. Go there and ask for Ike and he will give you all the information necessary to guide you while in Great Bend. As I have said before, you'll find him a regular circus encyclopedia--one lot owner in a thousand.

#### June 7, 1919

Although early this spring, as a rule, the shows for some two weeks or more encountered bad, rainy weather and yet when it was possible for the people to get out, business was good. The Hagenbeck-Wallace show possibly met with more hard luck than any of the rest--as for 16 days they encountered rain and during that time lost two days entirely. When it was possible for them to get

**LIVEROIS and DIX Aves.**  
**FRIDAY 1** WEST DETROIT TWO DAYS  
**1919**  
**SELLS-FLOTO SUPER CIRCUS**  
 FROM WHERE THE WEST BEGINS  
 MENAGERIE OF strange beasts from jungle, range and desert rim  
 PASTORAL BIRTH OF THE RAINBOW  
 NEARLY 1000 PEOPLE  
 425 ANIMALS  
 STREET PARADE AT 10 A.M. RAIN OR SHINE  
 2 PERFORMANCES 2 P.M. & 8 P.M.  
 BIG SHOWS COMBINED IN 3 RINGS  
 Dime Toss, Seat Sale, Glass Lick, at SANDERS, 141-143 Woodward Ave.  
 Prices Same as Charged at the Grounds.

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**NEW CIRCUS GROUNDS--GRAND RIVER AND MACKINAW AVES.**  
**DETROIT, MICH. Tomorrow and Tuesday**  
**1919**  
**RINGLING BROS. BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS**  
 STUNNING CONGRESS OF ALL NEW FEATURES  
 UNION OF THE GIANTS  
 STUNNING RIG  
 COMBINATION WORLD'S FIRST SUPER CIRCUS  
 PARADE AT 10 A.M. PERFORMANCES DOWN TOWN AT 1 P.M. & 7 P.M. PERFORMANCES AT 2 AND 8 P.M.  
 ONE TICKET ADMITS TO ALL PERFORMANCES  
 EARTH'S BIGGEST ZOO  
 10 MILLION POUNDS ELEPHANT  
 EIGHT GIRAFFES

Entrance free of admission tickets and reserved seats. Circus day at market. Palace of Mirrors, 141 Woodward Avenue. Dime toss at 10 A.M. at grounds.



into a town and get the show up, business, considering the weather, was phenomenal.

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey combined took more money during their New York engagement than was ever known in the show business and to accommodate people, many times gave three shows or more a day, forenoon, afternoon and night. Invariably at the night show they would turn away thousands of people. Their first stand under canvas was Brooklyn, New York, where they showed a week under canvas, the weather being none too good, and yet the people came just the same.

The same thing happened in Madison Square Garden at the night shows; they turned away the people.

From Brooklyn they took to the one-day stands and are going west. Friday and Saturday of this week they show in Cleveland, Ohio for two days.

Just where Janesville will stand in getting the circus this year is not yet known, but with Janesville's present reputation as a growing town, it is fair to say that we will not be put in the discard.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace show is billed for Rockford, June 15, so that the two largest shows on the road are headed this way. The Sells-Floto show which is at Denver, Colorado and possibly the finest show for the size on the road, is making its first trip eastward and for some two weeks or more encountered bad weather. In two towns, Columbus and Akron, the following day, the rain poured down all day long and the show did not unload in either of these towns, but went from there to Buffalo, New York where they showed having a tremendous business, turning away the people at the night shows. It was packed back down to the ring bank at the matinees.

After the first two or three weeks after the opening of the smaller shows, they encountered their share of rain and missed one or two stands entirely. This makes show business expensive for the reason that a man must stay back and pay the bills and with the feed lot and hotels, must make the best rates for then we can leave the town with the people feel-

ing right toward the shows, which goes a long way toward the welcome for the next season. Several times during my time with the Forepaugh show when it was impossible to make the town, it was always my business to stay back to pay the bills and make the best settlement possible with the people and leave them with the feeling that the show had been entirely fair in its dealings.

A few days ago I met an old friend in the business who, by the way, was on his way from Minneapolis to Chicago and made it his business to stop over a couple of hours in Baraboo to look over the town in which he spent several years with

put it on in the best possible manner.

In the blacksmith shops, half a dozen or more animals were singing out and in the paint shops there were a dozen or more painters painting in white and green and two more laying on gold leaf that cost thousands of dollars to make the tableaux and cages look right for the coming parade. How many thousands of dollars it took to remodel and rebuild the great show for that season I would not undertake to say.

It was at the opening of the show at the Coliseum in Chicago and everything looked as bright as a silver dollar and not even one bit of old wardrobe could be seen. But what a

change the winter quarters being moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut has made to the paint shops, the blacksmith shops, etc. Where this work was done and the hotel where the workmen were quartered, the large heavy padlocks tell the story of the great winter quarters being deserted



the Ringlings while in the business. This carried me back several years when I was the guest of the Ringlings for the day, about three weeks before their opening at the Coliseum in Chicago. At that time everything was moving as fast as possible as it was the year that they put on the production "Joan of Arc," and Al Ringling took me in hand and showed me through from one end of the quarters to the other and introduced me to the famous scenic artist who had been there for a week, painting the large drop curtain and putting on the finishing touches. When the curtain was unrolled as far as possible, he had pictured out "Joan of Arc," the Catholic church on the hill where she knelt in prayer before taking charge of the great army. When the entire curtain was opened so far as the painting could show, it depicted the life and the final triumphs of this little woman.

This was one reason why the Ringlings were a success in the business, for when they put on any big spectacle; no expense was spared to

and everything belonging to the winter quarters looked deserted and it was just like a country cemetery. Yet some people say that it is possible for them to bring both shows back to Baraboo for the close of this season, but this, as far as I know is guess work, and it is probable that both shows will go back to the old Barnum & Bailey winter quarters at Bridgeport, Connecticut.

I never will forget my first visit to New York with the show and while the selling of the tickets was not any more difficult than on the one-day stands, when the doors were closed with standing room to go in and look the great crowds over, it was a sight worthy of seeing. Many of the box seats were occupied by people that I have read about for years.

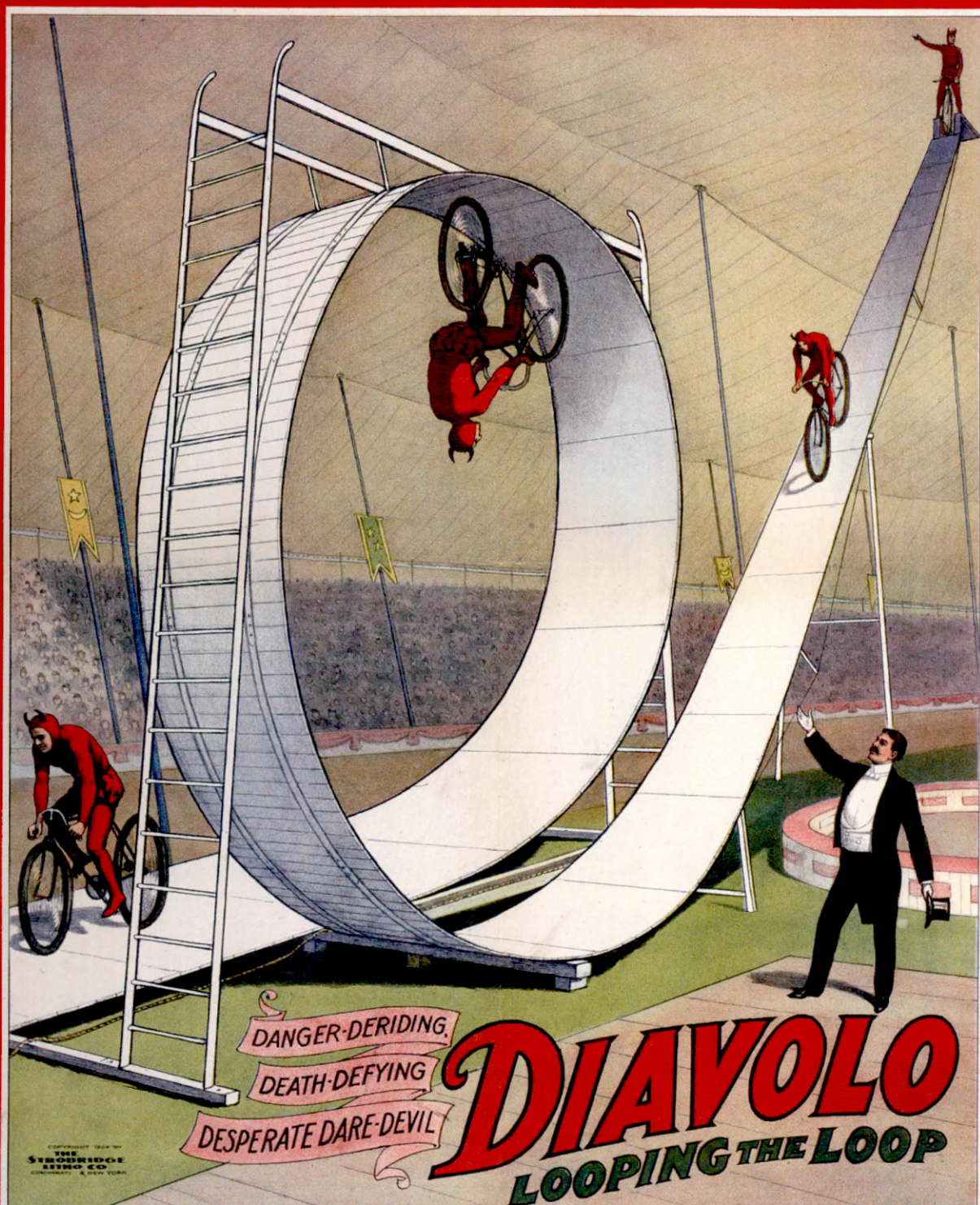
It is fair to say that if the circus comes anywhere within a reasonable distance from Janesville, I will be there at least to greet a few old friends and spend one more day of sunshine in the business.



# FOREPAUGH & SELLS BROTHERS

ENORMOUS SHOWS UNITED

J. A. BAILEY, W. W. COLE, LEWIS SELLS & PETER SELLS EQUAL OWNERS



**THE VERITABLE CAP-SHEAF OF ALL HAZARDOUS EXPLOITS**  
THE EXTREME AND ABSOLUTE LIMIT OF SENSATIONALISM REACHED AT LAST. BEYOND THE TREMENDOUSLY  
TERRIBLE TEMERITY AND ILLIMITABLE, INIMITABLE INTREPIDITY OF DIAVOLO, NO MAN MAY GO.